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Inscriptions of (in)equality: Interrogating texts and practices in an Indian classroom

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Department of Sociology

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Declaration

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* * *

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* * *

Abstract

Inequality in and through formal school education has been part of the Indian education since it came into existence under British rule. In contemporary India this educational stratification is taking increasingly alarming and unacceptable forms even as socioeconomic disparities are on the rise. This stratification manifests itself in all aspects of education from infrastructure and facilities in schools to availability of teachers and the quality of curriculum and pedagogy in classrooms. However, there is a dearth of ethnographic work which systematically investigates students' classroom experience, especially, work that locates this experience within larger social, economic and political logics and attends to intersecting power relations in contemporary India.

This thesis offers accounts of (re)production of social relations, specifically, intersections of gender, class and caste (genderclaste), in and through education through an interrogation of classroom texts and practices. On the basis of a classroom ethnography conducted in an urban school in central India, this thesis attempts to understand how genderclaste relations inscribe various aspects of students' classroom experience, namely, pedagogy, curriculum and what I term, the moral curriculum. Drawing upon feminist critiques of caste- and gender-based difference and discrimination, that is, Brahmanical patriarchy as well as its intersections with class relations in the urban Indian context, this thesis offers insights into how students are constructed within the dominant classroom discourse as historically specific, genderclasted subjects. Further, within the theoretical framework offered by Michel Foucault's and Jacques Ranciere's respective engagements with subjectivity, it also focuses on instances of students' governmental and political subjectivation.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that teachers' class-caste distance from students and the institutionalisation of dominant genderclaste relations in schools seek to render students' concerns, constraints and abilities invisible in the classroom. However, students assert their equality through micro narratives of resistance, contestation and survival in the classroom, thus disrupting social and educational categories ("Dalit", "girl", "good" student) and opening up possibilities for change.

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List of Abbreviations

APL	Above Poverty Line.
BD	Bajarang Dal.
BIMARU	Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh (acronym representing the four most backward states in India).
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party.
BPL	Below Poverty Line.
Gol	Government of India.
IWC	Informal Working Class.
JNV	Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya.
KV	Kendriya Vidyalaya.
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development.
MP	Madhya Pradesh
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research and Training.
NCF	National Curriculum Framework.
NEP	National Economic Policy (1991).
NPE	National Policy of Education.
RSK	Rajys Shiksha Kendra.
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.
RTE	Right to Education (refers to the 'Right of children to free and compulsory education' Act, 2009).
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Campaign).
UDT	Upper Divisional Teacher.

Glossary

<i>Bahar</i>	Outside.
<i>Bade</i>	Old(er).
<i>Bade papa</i>	Father's older brother.
<i>Badhai</i>	Carpenter.
<i>Beedi</i>	Indigenous equivalent of cigarette, rolled out of <i>tendu</i> leaves.
<i>Beldar</i>	Mason.
<i>Bhaiya</i>	Older brother.
<i>Bigadna</i>	(In the thesis) To stray from the straight and narrow.
<i>Chacha</i>	Father's younger brother.
<i>Chachi</i>	Chacha's wife.
<i>Chhori</i>	Girl.
<i>Dada</i>	Father's father.
<i>Dadi</i>	Father's mother.
<i>Fuddi</i>	Shuttlecock.
<i>Ghar</i>	Home.
Hindi-belt	The north and central Indian states where Hindi is the primary language, namely, Bihar, Chhatisgarh, Delhi, Gujrat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh.
<i>Iskool</i>	The way the English word, 'school', is pronounced. This pronunciation is locally seen as indicating the working class location of the speaker.
<i>Ji</i>	A word added to show respect for those older to one, and/or in formal contexts.
<i>Kendra</i>	Centre.
<i>Kendriya</i>	Central.

<i>Maika</i>	Natal home/family.
<i>Na</i>	Can either mean 'no', or 'isn't it?' Used in the latter sense in this thesis. I have retained this word in excerpts from interviews in order to retain individual students' style of speaking and the flavour of the conversation.
<i>Rajya</i>	State.
<i>Rashtra</i>	Nation.
<i>Roti</i>	Chapati; bread made from whole wheat in India.
<i>RSS</i>	The Rashtriya Swayamsevan Sangh, or the RSS, is a right-wing, Hindu nationalist organisation. Existing scholarship has documented its exceptional organisational capacity and activities. Fundamental to the operation of this organisation is the creation and sustenance of a dense network of RSS branches, particularly, in the Hindi-belt; RSS branches, or <i>shakhas</i> as they are called in Hindi, organise classes and camps to induct neighbourhood children and adults into the Hindutva (Hindu nationalist) way of thinking.
<i>Saadhu bhai</i>	The husband of one's wife's sister.
<i>Sabji/Sabzi</i>	Vegetable.
<i>Samaj</i>	'Society', in general, but in the context of this thesis, the term has been used in its narrower sense to refer to the specific social groups within which marriages are permitted (endogamous group). This was how participants used the term.
<i>Sangh</i>	Association.
<i>Seth</i>	Boss.
<i>Shiksha</i>	Education.
<i>Thela</i>	Hand cart; used by vendors in India.
<i>Vidyalaya</i>	School.

Chapter 1

An Indian tale of education and power: a case for engaging with (in)equality

‘Because there is not a proper structure to accommodate our acts of stepping out of the caste order, getting an education presents many everyday practical problems. For example, Dalit girls in Haryana don’t have many hostels. When there are hostels, we don’t have the means to pay for them. This means that we have to travel long distances. I used to travel nearly 100km everyday by bus, 50km each way. To avoid this commute, many Dalit men stayed at Dharamsalas for days at a time. But we women had to run back home before it gets too dark. This often meant that that we had to board a particular bus at a particular time. As a consequence, there was then no time to visit the library for reading or to take part in extracurricular activities. When we get back home in the evening, the day doesn’t end. We have to wash, clean, cook and see to the care of our siblings and family members. We have to do ALL this and STILL perform well at college. I often ask – is persevering through these conditions, in itself, not meritorious enough?’

~ From I know Rohith’s story because it could have been my own, by Manisha Mashaal¹

‘I put my pen down, I will not let that poem force me to write it because it’s not the poem I want to write. It’s the poem I am being reduced to, reduced to proving my life is human because it is relatable, valuable because it is recognisable...

[...]

I refuse to be respectable. Instead, love us when we are lazy, love us when we are poor...

Love us high as kites, unemployed, joy riding, time wasting, failing at school, love us filthy...Love us...when we don’t offer our homes or free taxi rides after the event. When we’re wretched, suicidal, naked and contributing nothing. Love us then, because if you need me to prove my humanity, I’m not the one that’s not human.’

¹ <http://theladiesfinger.com/know-rohiths-story/>. Accessed on: 10/09/2017, 15: 49. Manisha Mashaal is a Dalit feminist activist, writer and orator.

~From *This is not a humanising poem*, by Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan²

In this thesis I am concerned with the (re)production of power relations in and through education in India. Specifically, I focus on negotiation and contestation of relations of gender, class and caste in the classroom through an interrogation of classroom texts and practices. In this chapter I set out the rationale and context for my empirical research. I offer a brief narrative of the historical context of educational inequality in the country (Kamat 2015; Kumar 2005, 1996; Velaskar 2010) and the society and politics of the state of Madhya Pradesh. The social and policy issues discussed here are relevant to the classroom and the power relations inscribing these issues have been systematically taken up in this thesis. With reference to the overall context traced in the chapter, and using Madeleine Arnot's (2002) work, I then explain what I mean by (re)production of power relations in this thesis and why it is important.

1.1 Inequality in and through education in India

1.1.1 Origins of formal schooling under British rule: beginnings of educational stratification

The existing system of formal, mass schooling in India was introduced by the colonial British government during the nineteenth century (Allender 2009, Kumar 2005). However, the state was not the only player and there were always a number of different categories of schools owned and managed by non-state players like Christian missionaries, philanthropic organisations or private individuals and trusts; this system has also been stratified since colonial times with social class often (but not always) determining the kind of school a family could access for their children

² <https://video.scroll.in/842657/watch-a-young-british-muslim-pakistani-immigrant-slays-islamophobia-with-her-potent-slam-poetry>. Accessed on: 10/09/2017, 15: 43. According to the news report, Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan is a twenty-two year old British Muslim rapper. This slam-poetry by her was read at Last Word Festival by Roundhouse, a London-based charity.

(Jain 2017, Kumar 2005). Not only were schools segregated by gender (Amin 1996, Chakravarti 1998, Forbes and Forbes 1999) and caste (Nambissan 1996), but formal education also excluded large sections of pupils based on their gender and caste. Social logics also led to educational exclusion, for example, many families refused to send girls to schools.

In briefly tracing the history of stratification³ in Indian education beginning in colonial India and continuing in contemporary neoliberal India, I make two important points: one, that the British altered the form and character of Indian education. Secondly, within this altered system, an indigenous elite managed to achieve an advantage right in the beginning, and through systematic manipulation of education policy in post-independence India, managed to perpetuate that educational advantage, and through it, their socioeconomic advantage. As I show in this chapter, it is not sufficient to critique neoliberal reforms. Instead, it is more fruitful to locate marginalised students' classroom and social experiences in contemporary India in the interplay of the 'lega[cy] of colonial rule' (Kumar 2005: 195) in education with India's more recent history of neoliberal economics.

Most significantly, Kumar (2005) shows that education in British India was largely restricted to the upper castes. Thus, educated Indians came largely from the indigenous elite in post-independence India and the consciousness of moral superiority that this uppercaste, middleclass, English educated Indian developed, is necessary for understanding the historical domination of particular sociocultural groups in and through education. In this thesis I show that it continues to shape social relations in and beyond the classroom.

The colonial education system introduced a break from the indigenous system in terms of what was taught, funding and teachers' social and institutional position. However, as Kumar (ibid: 196) notes, it did not 'succeed in altering the established pedagogic cree[d]' which 'demanded total submission of the student, and bestowed unquestioned authority upon the teacher.' More recently, Sarangapani (2003) has

³ This history is more complex and nuanced than I can explain in my thesis introduction, but the broad brush picture captures the most relevant aspects of educational stratification.

made similar observations. This institutional and moral authority of the teacher and her class-caste distance from students requires that close attention be paid to social relations in classroom and students' negotiation of these relations. Colonial education also did not concern itself with altering pedagogy because education was not a primary concern of the British government and there was no impetus in the shape of 'large-scale industrialisation', unlike at home, in Britain. (Kumar 2005: 200). The curriculum introduced by the British was far removed from students' everyday lives and came to be seen as 'useful mainly for success in examinations' (ibid: 200); as I show in chapter seven, it continues to be so. Kumar (ibid: 99) recounts that lower caste groups sought to appropriate education as a way out of socioeconomic exploitation but 'this egalitarian pressure' only brought limited expansion of the system and could not challenge institutionalisation of elitist, Brahmanical worldviews in pedagogy or curriculum.

1.1.2 Post-independence and neoliberal sharpening of educational stratification

Kumar (ibid: 201) further points out, that in independent India '[d]istribution of educational opportunities among the lower strata proceeded side by side with the growth of an elite sub-system of schooling.' The rationale was that the newly independent nation needed this elite sub system of education to drive progress and modernisation. Thus not only were private schools encouraged (Kumar 2005, Jain 2017) but also special categories carved out within the government sector (Kumar 1998, 2005); and 'elementary education remained a neglected aspect of planned development[t]' in independent India (Velaskar 2010: 63). For example the central schools or Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) that 'catered to the needs of union government functionaries' (Kumar 1996: 2371) and continue to be nearly impossible to access for the working classes outside of public sector enterprises. Medium of education in these schools has been English which resulted in exclusions both within and through the KVs (I owe my own social and educational privilege, partly, to this category of schools).

Similarly, under pressure from the rural landowning elite 'middle and higher secondary schools', that is, the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas, were launched under the National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 at a time when the number and quality of primary schools was far from adequate in the country (Nambissan and Batra 1989). The NPE 1986 encouraged further stratification through introducing non-formal streams of education for working children and fostering greater privatisation of school education (Velaskar 2010). Kumar (1998) notes that changes introduced via the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1991 had fundamentally altered education and society in India through its support for marketization and globalisation in education and beyond. Between the 1960s and 1990s 'the heavy rate of elimination from school had remained almost stable' (ibid: 1392) thanks to low spending, and pedagogic and curricular issues. Even before liberalisation almost the only expense in government schools was teacher salary (ibid); with the NEP and neoliberal reforms in education this expense has also been sought to be eliminated. Teachers have been recruited on contractual basis, leading to a number of categories of teachers and in states like Madhya Pradesh (MP) recruitment of regular full-time teachers almost came to an end over the 1990s (Jha 2005). This also happened as a result of the central government gradually passing on increasing financial responsibility to state governments; this has been a particularly contentious approach for states like Madhya Pradesh, which continue to be the most underdeveloped states in India. There were also 'paradoxical outcomes' on the developmental and educational fronts: high enrolment and low retention and attendance on the one hand and 'lower child mortality rates but no significant rise in nutrition or health' on the other (Kumar 1998).

While there has been expansion of the government school system, in post-liberalisation India, (Velaksar 1990, 2010; Kumar 1998, Sarangapani 2010), multiple standards of educational quality have also been allowed to flourish. Thus, we see what Kamat (2015) calls "'five star' schools' for the super-rich at one end of the spectrum, and 'low fee private' schools for poor families on the other (Srivastava 2013). Ironically, at the same time, a narrowly defined 'measurable' notion of "quality" has emerged within neoliberal discourses of/on education which has hijacked all discussion of the 'substantive dimension of education' (Sarangapani

2010). These discourses have also led to a shift from the ‘first principles of equality’, that is, egalitarianism to “‘second’ principles of equality, namely, equity and compensation.’ (Velaskar 2010: 71) Instead of ensuring equality of opportunity and quality for all children the Indian state instead offered targeted subsidies and compensatory packages (for example, scholarships consisting of paltry amounts being offered to Dalits, girls, disabled students, etc.). Rather than guaranteeing secure livelihoods and wages, the state began to offer special, and inadequate, packages to children of informal sector workers. Thus in the neoliberal phase of India’s development education is increasingly characterised by ‘persistent inequalities in access and participation’, state withdrawal from education (ibid: 78), privatisation ‘and its (un)equalising effects’ (ibid: 79), everyday processes of ‘dominance and discrimination’ in schools and ‘inequality in achievement’ (ibid: 80).

1.2 Society and politics in Madhya Pradesh

In the previous section I have sketched an outline of the educational inequality in India. I now offer an overview of the social context of the state of Madhya Pradesh. I chose the state and city primarily for reasons of linguistic-cultural affinity and ease of access but also because it has seen some of the worst impact of neoliberal reforms in education and has historically been a ‘laggard’ state in terms of economic and human development. In fact, it is one of the BIMARU states; the acronym stands for the least developed states Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in India – and the words ‘*bimaru*’ in Hindi means ‘ill’.

This is the context in which I conducted empirical work in a state government run school (also referred to as ‘government school’ or ‘state school’ locally and in this thesis) in Indore in Madhya Pradesh. These schools are attended largely by poor, Dalit, and tribal children in India and research shows that when possible parents send boys to private schools while enrolling daughters in government schools (Manjrekar 2003, Nambissan 2004, NCERT 2006). As it happened, the classroom I researched

was not only populated largely by non-Brahman children, but also by children of informal sector workers, that is, workers who had no security of jobs or incomes⁴.

The school where fieldwork was done is under the authority of the Rajya Shiksha Kendra (RSK) formed as part of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in 2003. The SSA was introduced at the national level in 2000-2001 and is 'implemented as India's main programme for universalising elementary education. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children.' (GoI 2011: 2) It is also the vehicle for implementing the Right to Education Act, 2009 which promises free and compulsory education to children between the ages of six and fourteen years. The SSA represents all contemporary neoliberal reform in education and it is through SSA discourses that the idea and meaning of "quality" entered – and continues to shape – policy for, and practice in, the government school system in India (Sarangapani 2010, Velaskar 2010).

What is now MP saw 'massive economic exploitation' of the state's forest and mineral resources under colonial rule 'mediated through one of the worst labour conditions.' (Gupta 2005: 5094) Peasants too were 'alienated' and 'indebted'; despite this and upper caste landownership, neither before, nor after independence, did the state witness any kind of peasant movement, the southern and south-western parts of the country (Sedwal and Kamat 2008). It was also 'very far' from the 'anti-brahmin social enlightenment' that characterises states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu in the country despite having the highest proportion of Brahmins in the country (Gupta 2005: 5096). While Gupta (ibid) argues that lack of social and cultural change shaped the low industrial development of Madhya Pradesh, Kumar (2005) argues that historically, the Hindi-belt did not experience the change that lower caste groups achieved in the South and the West through participation in education, because the cultural and political environment needed to capitalize on education did not exist.

⁴ For a discussion of the condition of informal sector workers and the idea of the 'informal working class', see chapter 2.

The principle on which MP was organised as a state in independent India also had an impact on the politics of the state. Gupta (2005: 5096) points out that it was carved out of the left over portions of neighbouring states and '[t]he state bourgeois, thus, lacked a "Madhya Pradesh" identity. For the region, it meant, that there was little sense of "ownership" among the governing elite for the various programmes in the state.' Recently, Singh (2015) has argued in her book that 'subnationalist' identities have played a central role in the development of southern states in the country and it is something that has pulled down the Hindi-belt states like Madhya Pradesh (cf. Kohli 2013). While the southern states have reached Human Development Indices (HDI) resembling OECD countries the BIMARU states of India are closer to sub-Saharan Africa in terms of their HDI. However, Indore, the former princely state ruled by the Holkars, did see industrial effort by both the princely state – and through its encouragement – by private players. It has also historically attracted migrants from within and outside the state, but the 'uneven impact' of liberalisation saw the already underdeveloped states like MP 'slipping further' (Gupta 2005: 5097). Liberalisation also adversely affected investment and social spending in the state, including spending on education, as mentioned earlier. This brief description gives a sense (albeit deterministic) of historical social relations in the state within which my engagement of caste and class relations in the classroom in this thesis is situated.

1.3 Research concerns in this thesis

The above accounts are macro accounts of inequality in and through education which dominate Indian scholarship in Education. I argue in the next chapter that while policy and curriculum are the best documented aspects of education in India, there is a dearth of critical accounts of classroom processes that help link macro narratives with micro narratives. My experience as a sporadic activist protesting the Indian state's unequal education policies and structure had also only introduced me to such macro narratives. It was with my training in the discipline of Education (2009-2011) that I began to come across more nuanced, complex and feminist accounts of what happened in homes and classrooms. However, even that training did not

familiarise me with poststructuralist feminisms or systematic theorisations of class and caste relations in social and educational processes.

Thus during the MA programme I became curious about how people made sense of everyday institutional texts and practices and how they negotiated these in order to survive and succeed, both educationally and socially. That is, I developed an interest in both materialist accounts of power as well as its 'productive' aspect (Atkinson 2008). In this thesis, 1) I systematically theorise how intersections of gender, class and caste relations shape students' classroom experiences, while also 2) attending to how students negotiate classroom contexts in a social and institutional setting characterised by multiple and severe limitations.

1.3.1 Defining '(re)production'

In this section I define important terms and articulate the overall themes in relation to the focus of this thesis. A focus on reproduction allows one to engage with the 'relationship of schools to the economy, dominant class interests, and the hierarchical structures of economic and cultural power.' (Arnot 2002: 107) This is what Arnot calls the 'why' of reproduction. There is also the 'how' of reproduction that feminist work from a 'cultural perspective' takes on. Such work looks at the micro processes of education to understand how cultural domination and thus reproduction of existing social relations is achieved through education (ibid: 106). Combining this understanding of 'reproduction' with Indian feminist critiques of gender, class and caste relations, in this thesis, I interrogate how existing social relations are sought to be reproduced through various aspects of the classroom experience (pedagogy, teacher-pupil relationships or curriculum).

However, Arnot also argues that work looking at reproduction (cultural and Marxist feminists) failed to recognise and engage with the processes and practices of 'struggle and conflict' (ibid: 112) in the classroom. Both kinds of scholarship tends to view the experience of education as deterministic rather than appreciating the significance of negotiated and contested nature of social relations (ibid). Arnot's solution is to draw upon a theory of cultural production based on Bernstein's and Bourdieu's work. She also replaces the notion of 'reproduction' with 'hegemony' in

order to focus on the '*active*' engagement of students in production of 'historically specific' power relations. Instead of going Arnot's way I complicate feminist materialist accounts of reproduction of social relations with Foucauldian accounts of subjectification and Rancièrian accounts of 'dissensus' (Rancière 2010) in this thesis. In chapter 2, I discuss this theoretical framework and the underlying political concerns.

My engagement with Foucauldian conceptualisation of power proved fruitful, and combined with a Rancièrian understanding of 'intellectual equality' (Rancière 1991, Bingham and Biesta 2010), has produced important insights into students' efforts and capabilities to participate in, and, challenge dominant social relations in and through education. This brings me to Mashaal's and Manzoor-Khan's writings with which I began this chapter. These excerpts capture the two central themes in this thesis: difference and equality. While Mashaal challenges Brahmanical definitions and categories in education (for example, the notion of "merit") and argues for a different conceptualisation based on Dalit women's worldviews, Manzoor-Khan's assertion of equality and her explicit refusal to accept a *conditional* equality issue a challenge to the 'police logic' (Rancière 2010) of identity categories and moral-social hierarchies. These two sets of challenges perfectly capture the impetus behind this thesis.

My effort has been to hold on to a productive tension between centring difference and oppression in discourses of education and moving beyond an understanding of (in)equality that ties individuals to identities. At the same time I also try to account for material and discursive aspects of power relations in and beyond the classroom. Thus this thesis has been an exercise in grappling with these two sets of tensions. In the process, I have produced a reading of students' lives that offers insights into both the (shifting) "structures" that place limits on their efforts to participate in the classroom discourse in particular ways, as well as students' efforts to challenge these limits and disrupt the categories that bind them to their social locations ("good"/"bad" student, "Dalit", "girl"). A Rancièrian ability to read narratives of assertions of equality by students opens up a range of possibilities for reimagining the learner and the power relations she participates in, and thus, for intervening in classroom texts and processes.

1.3.2 Adding a focus on religious nationalism

Lastly, I would like to briefly discuss something that had an especially personal and emotional impact on me while I was in Indore doing fieldwork. Madhya Pradesh has historically been receptive to Hindu right-wing nationalist agendas (Kumar 2005, Gupta 2005); while Hindu revivalist tendencies were on the rise in the Hindi-belt⁵ and elsewhere since the 1990s (Menon and Nigam 2007, Baviskar 2005). The anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, a state to the west of Madhya Pradesh, in early 2002 further sharpened anti-Muslim sentiment in Madhya Pradesh in complex ways (Baviskar 2005). Being the daughter of a Hindu upper-caste mother and a Muslim father and growing up in right-wing towns and alongside disapproving extended family, I learnt early in life to identify myself strategically (that is, hide the requisite part of my parentage). The 'banal Hinduism' of Indian schools⁶ (Billig 1995 cited in Froerer 2007: 1067) also played a role in ensuring that I learnt to identify as (at least, half) Hindu. Thus, though conscious of the increasingly pro-Hindutva⁷ sentiments in Indore and in the country generally (Menon and Nigam 2007) I had consciously decided – out of a sense of self-preservation – not to look at religion as a category of differentiation or explore the phenomenon of Hindutva in the classroom. However, I could not escape it. The Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) had just registered a phenomenal victory at the centre (May 2014) and had been in power in Madhya Pradesh for ten years (since April 2004) and the atmosphere in Indore was blatantly anti-Muslim.

As I began visiting the school I noticed graffiti in my Hindu-dominated, middle class neighbourhood that demanded death for “cow-killers”, a euphemism for Muslims⁸

⁵ Hindi-belt comprises the northern states of India where Hindi is the language of the majority and consists of: Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindi_Belt. Accessed on: 26/09/2017, 17: 48.

⁶ Including in the Kendriya Vidyalayas (central schools) that I attended and where both my parents taught in smaller towns of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

⁷ 'Hindutva, which means Hinduness, is a form of Hindu cultural nationalism and is the political philosophy of the Hindu right wing.' (Menon and Nigam 2007: 36).

⁸ The rhetoric has also targeted Dalits in parts of the Hindi-belt as Dalits are historically associated in the Brahmanical worldview, to the skinning of dead animals,

and a plea for everyone to become vegetarian. The graffiti followed me all the way to the school through various neighbourhoods (and was actually to be found almost everywhere in the city). I learnt to be grateful for my Muslim auto-rickshaw driver. The discourse of vegetarianism and communal difference and antipathy continued in conversations with teachers and students and in tales from beyond the classroom. Perhaps, also because of its personal implications for me, it became difficult to ignore or escape and became part of this thesis though secondary to genderclaste⁹, but linked to these; in chapter seven I discuss the implications of a pro-Hindutva worldview for classroom engagements with caste, in chapter six I discuss the classroom experiences of Muslim students.

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

In this introduction chapter I have outlined the history of inequality in and through education and explained my overarching research concerns in this thesis. In the next chapter I review existing literature to show how it has engaged with difference and discrimination in classrooms. Specifically I review literature on classroom teaching, curricular representations of marginalised social groups as well as the moral policing and disciplining of students in classrooms. On the basis of this review I discuss the gaps in our understanding of how power relations are (re)produced in the classroom through pedagogy and the moral and official curricula transacted in the classroom. I also offer details of the theoretical framework I deploy in the rest of the thesis to critically analyse gender, class and caste relations as well as negotiation and contestation of these relations. These include feminist critiques of Brahmanical patriarchy, emerging analyses of “childhood” and the ‘informal working class’ in contemporary India, Michel Foucault’s work on power and subjectification and

an occupation, though vital, but perceived as ritually impure, and thus, degrading, within the caste-based organization of Hindu society.

⁹ I have used this term throughout the thesis in order to capture the intersections of gender, class and caste relations. For discussion, see chapter 2.

Jacques Rancière's 'thesis of equality' in addition to the 'deficit model' and Young's and Apple's work on the sociology of knowledge.

In chapter three, I elaborate on the methodology that is, the theoretical and political concerns underlying my choice of classroom ethnography for empirical research. I discuss the feminist considerations guiding my choices during fieldwork, that is, the data collected, approaches to analysis and in resolving ethical issues arising during and after fieldwork. I use Visweswaran's notion of decolonization and Rancière's notion of 'politics' or 'dissensus' to discuss ethical and analytical concerns in the chapter.

Chapter four is my first data analysis chapter in which I look at children's lives beyond school in order to understand urban "childhoods". Such an understanding helps challenge the dominant notion of childhood underpinning education policy and practice in most Indian schools. I look at children's responsibilities, their labour in and outside their homes, their role in informal economy as well as the implications of migration, informalisation and their participation in wage and non-wage labour for their education. I also take a look at boys' participation in local cultural and political processes which shape their participation in school as well as their notion of masculinity and femininity.

In chapter five I move the discussion to the classroom, beginning my engagement with these children's classroom experiences with analyses of pedagogic processes. Specifically I engage with the social relations that inscribe teaching and learning practices and teacher-learner interaction in government schools. This is important given the significant class and caste differences between teachers and students. I draw upon the deficit model to theorise these practices and relationships while using Rancière's work to theorise students' efforts to challenge dominant social relations and disrupt the categories of "good" and "bad" students.

Chapter six builds on this analysis of pedagogic processes by attending to what I term the 'moral curriculum' of the classroom. This curriculum consists of dominant gendered, classed and caste ways of being in and beyond the classroom. I list the components of this curriculum and detail the practices through which teachers seek to impose various components. I also closely analyse students' means of contesting

and/or accommodating the moral curriculum in the process, again, challenging not only teachers' views of them but also the categories that organise dominant moral discourses in the classroom.

In the last analysis chapter, I turn to an interrogation of 'official knowledge' (Apple 2013) transacted in the classroom. I analyse representations of gender class and caste groups in some of the textbook as well as examining the distance between these representations and children's lived realities. In addition, I also attend to the way curricular form controls pedagogic practices using Apple's work. Lastly, in this chapter, I focus on the relationship between policy and practice through an analysis of assessment practices in the classroom. Thus I show that not only is curricular content far removed from the children's everyday lives but curricular form and neoliberal reforms in assessment guide classroom practices in a way that children fail to develop the skills and abilities required to succeed in education.

Chapter 2

Understanding texts, practices and ‘dissensus’: a framework for theorising (in)equality

In this thesis I am concerned with classroom texts and practices that seek to (re)produce genderclaste relations in and through education. Since there has not been systematic focus on classroom processes (Nambissan 2004, Nambissan and Rao 2013), it has not been possible to rely upon an existing framework or a coherent body of literature in order to make a case, or outline the theoretical framework, for such a study. Thus in this chapter I draw out insights from existing literature on how narratives of gender, class and caste have been produced, understood and deployed in Indian classrooms and use these to make a case for focussing on reproduction of social relations in and through school education. As I show Indian sociology of education has particularly failed to engage with theories and processes of (re)production, its analysis of narratives of class and caste in classrooms being sporadic and limited often to discussions of teacher attitudes and textbook representations. Gender as a category of differentiation has fared relatively better, and there has been work interrogating the gendered nature of classroom processes (Bhattacharjee 1999, Nambissan 2004). However, on the whole, there has not been adequate sociological and/or feminist engagement with education (Chanana 2002, Velaskar 2016).

The two areas to which scholars of education have paid systematic attention are policy and curriculum. Even here, in case of policy the focus has been on neoliberal reforms (Jha 2005; Kamat 2015; Tilak 2004; Velaskar 1990, 2010) rather than a more situated historical account (except, for example, Kumar 2005). Nor, as Chanana (2006) notes, has there been a feminist sociological analysis of policy texts. In this chapter, I begin with a review of literature critiquing the normative notion of childhood that underpins education policy and practice and the political economy of education which this particular notion serves. I draw upon this literature and the historical narrative of childhood it traces, in order to make a case for a study of

children's lives beyond school to understand exactly what sort of "child" is the student.

With reference to the arguments outlined above, I flesh out a theoretical framework for a feminist engagement with gender, class and caste structures in contemporary India. I primarily use Uma Chakravarti's work on caste and gender (1992, 2009a, 2012) and Rina Agarwala's research on informal sector economy and what she has termed the 'informal working class' (Agarwala 2003, 2006; Agarwala and Herring 2013; Harriss-White 1998, 2003). Thus a major component of the analytical framework deployed in this thesis consists of these analyses and critiques of gender, class and caste relations and debates centring on the normative notion of "childhood". I follow this discussion with reviews of literature on pedagogy and the social context within which teaching-learning relations develop in (urban) Indian classrooms. This review helps establish the aspects of classroom texts and practices that merit systematic attention in terms of the (re)production of power relations in and through schooling.

This attention to power relations is framed, in addition to feminist critiques of caste and gender, by Foucault's work on subjectification and disciplinary power as well as Jacques Rancière's thesis of equality and his notion of "dissensus". Using Foucault and Rancière allows me to ensure that this thesis does not adopt a determinist approach to understanding power relations and adequately theorises acts and moments of contestation and negotiation in and beyond the classroom. Most importantly, such an approach opens up possibilities for reimagining classroom texts, practices and the social relations inscribing classroom discourses.

In the last part of the chapter I focus on the curricula followed in this classroom. Chapters six and seven deal, respectively, with the moral curriculum and the official curriculum transacted in the classroom. To that end, I present a discussion of literature on what constitutes moral policing and what it achieves in terms of (re)production of social relations through schooling. I found that the process of moral policing occupies pride of place within the classroom discourse; though some aspects of this moral policing, especially those relating to gender images and relations, have been discussed in existing literature on girls' schooling, I show that a

more nuanced understanding of the way students are simultaneously gendered, classed and caste, is urgently needed.

Lastly I discuss the prescribed curriculum in terms of how various social groups are represented in textbook. While curriculum is an area that has been paid sustained attention within Indian sociology of education, once again, there is a lack of attention to the significance of curriculum and assessment in reproduction of class-caste relations with schooling (and thus upward mobility). More specifically, this gap encourages me to focus on 'curricular form' and assessment practices in an effort to theorise their nature and impact using Michael Apple's (2014) and Michael F D Young's (1971) work on the sociology of knowledge. A rare example of such work can be found in Aarathi Sriprakash's (2012), *Pedagogies of Development*. Drawing upon her work and Apple's notion of curricular form and 'control', I also focus on some recent reforms in education in terms of their influence on classroom teaching learning and assessment.

2.1 'Genderclaste': a framework for analysing intersecting inequalities in and through education

Existing literature shows that girls' education and gender issues in schooling are crucial questions in Indian sociology of education (Jha and Jhingaran 2002, Kumar 1996, Manjrekar 2003, Nambissan 2004, NCERT 2005, Saxena et al. 2012). However, neither feminists (Manjrekar 2003, Patel 1998) nor sociologists (Chanana 2002, 2006) have focussed adequately or systematically on either issue. There is even less systematic work on how caste-hierarchies in wider society embed classroom experiences. Most of the work that engages with teachers' attitudes and school rituals/processes in order to understand gender and caste relations does not adequately theorise (re)production, or focus on students' modes of accommodation and resistance (for exceptions, see Bhattacharjee 1998, Thapan 2006).

Similarly, though there is an impressive body of existing scholarship on Indian education policy that analyses and critiques neoliberal reforms in educational and is, thus, related to the education of the poor (Kamat 2015, Jha 2005, Ramachandran

2004, Tilak, Velaskar 1990, 2010), there has been little ethnographic focus on social class. Since the classroom I was researching consisted almost solely of children of informal workers, it became important to understand children's classroom experiences in the larger context of a national and global economic paradigm that entails greater informalisation of developing economies (Harriss-White 2003, 1998; Agarwala 2003, Agarwala and Herring 2013) and a relentless uncertainty that inscribes the lives of informal sector workers (Agarwala & Herring 2013, Breman 1996). In view of these socioeconomic conditions an intersectional approach to understanding classroom processes was inevitable (Velaskar 2016).

In this section I detail the specific meanings of Brahmanical patriarchy and social class in which I am interested and which further clarify my reasons for adopting an intersectional approach. Developing such an India-specific theoretical framework also became important because 1) of the historical specificity of India's system of mass public schooling (Kumar 2013, Jain 2017) and 2) stratification through education works differently in India compared, for example, to the British or American school systems. The latter use the mechanism of streaming (for example, Keddie 1971, Arnot 2002) after the first few years of school education, whereas, in India, school education has historically (Kumar 1996, 2013; Jain 2017) been stratified through the more expedient mechanism of encouraging multiple categories of schools right from primary and pre-primary levels (Kamat 2015; Velaskar 1990, 2005, 2010; Srivastava 2013). Since access to a given category of school is a function of the family's ability to pay for school education, in effect, a class-caste based system of education stratification has been achieved which allows multiple standards of quality (infrastructure, pedagogy, curriculum) to flourish (Kamat 2015; Pappu and Vasanta 2010; Velaskar 2005, 2010). Thus a theoretical framework which accounts for the larger economic paradigm as well as the specific social relations pervading classroom processes in India needed to be developed.

2.1.1 Patriarchy

In this thesis I use 'gender' as a category of analysis specifically in the context of Brahmanical patriarchy. By Brahmanical patriarchy I mean the specific system of

gender and caste based oppression that has historically operated in India in which roles, relations and status are rigidly and simultaneously defined based on gender and caste (Chakravarti 2009a, 2009b, 2012). Following on Gerda Lerner's (Lerner 1986 quoted in Chakravarti 2006: 1) work Chakravarti defines patriarchy as follows:

According to [Lerner's] formulation patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions in society and that women are deprived of access to such power. [Lerner] also points that this does not mean that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influences and resource[s.] ... [T]here is an ideology that men are superior to women and that women are, and should be controlled by men, and that women are regarded as the property of men.

Chakravarti notes that there is no one system of patriarchy and it has evolved across space and time in multiple ways (ibid). In my review I focus on the central features of the version dominant in the Indian subcontinent; one of these features is the relationship between structures of caste and gender. Chakravarti points out that 'the control over female sexuality' (ibid: 5) is more severe as a result of '*the need to maintain caste purit[y]*'. (emphasis added; ibid: 6) Thus, regulation of women's movement and sexuality is central to their role as 'gatekeepers' (Liddle and Joshi 1989) within the logic of Brahmanical patriarchy. Further, contemporary significance of control over women's 'reproductive potential' has to be seen within the imperatives of maintaining ownership of private property and 'class based exploitation[n]' which required women to be 'domesticated' as economy (and technology) developed to take its modern form (Mies 2014). For every group to retain control over assets and its status and position it has been important to guard women's sexuality as they are the ones with reproductive ability but inheritance passes from father to son (ibid, Chakravarti 2009a, Liddle and Joshi 1989).

Thus, the success of both class and caste structures depended on the extent to which women's sexuality could be controlled and channelized into marriage. That is, patterns of control over both production and reproduction must be unravelled

before we can understand the specifics of marginalisation, oppression and resistance in any given context. Understanding control over women's sexuality and their productive labour is essential to understanding the stringent control over their movement, in most parts of India even today; another important aspect of women's 'subordination' to men is the latter's control over the former's productive labour in and outside the house (whether they can work outside, where they can work and who ultimately controls the wages). Chakravarti (2006) also notes that 'paternalism', which she defines as a system of 'mutual obligations and reciprocal rights', is a central aspect of Brahmanical patriarchy and 'weakens the ability of the subordinated to see their subordination in political terms. At the same time the ideology enables the dominant to convince themselves that they are extending paternalistic benevolences (rather than dominance) to people inferior and weaker to themselves[s.]' 'Obedient' or *pativrata* women achieved high status in mythology and lore because of the system of rewards which bestowed 'certain rights, privileges, security and respect which can even take the form of worship.' (ibid: 6) This complicity was not just based on symbolic rewards but 'extracted' as a result of women's material dependence on men.

An important insight Chakravarti offers is the 'mechanism' through which caste and gender relations are sought to be maintained and reproduced: it is 'three-fold' and includes 1) the ideology of *pativrata* dharma that enjoins women to always observe fidelity and chastity, 2) the 'law and custom' as prescribed in religious scriptures, and 3) ever since 'early history', the state (Chakravarti 2006: 6). Endogamous marriage, that is marriage within one's *samaj*/caste is one of 'the strategies devised to reproduce the entire syste[m]' (Chakravarti 2009a: 27). Marriage rituals specifically spell out the control of the male over the female (Chakravarti 2009b: 17). As I show in this thesis endogamy and the control over women's movement are central not only to girls' access to education but also their overall experience of schooling.

2.1.2 Caste (and 'claste')

Chakravarti argues that in order to 'de-stabiliz[e]' Brahmanical patriarchy both gender and caste must be taken into account (2009a: 4). Secondly, both 'ritual' and

‘material’ aspects of caste must be considered (ibid: 6). To that end, Chakravarti uses Dalit intellectual, leader and icon Bhimrao Ambedkar’s formulation and definition according to which,

‘caste is a system of ‘graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt’. That is, as you go up the caste system the *power* and *status* of a caste group *increases*; as you go down the scale the *degree of contempt* for the caste *increases* as these castes have no power, are of low status and are regarded as dirty and polluting.’ (ibid: 7 emphasis in original)

Pollution here refers to ‘ritual impurity’. These specifics of caste-based discrimination are reflected in the interaction between Brahman teachers and non-Brahman (except a handful) pupils in the classroom I researched. I only outline the features of caste hierarchy that are relevant to this thesis: the control over labour, the dehumanization of Dalits (especially women) and the exclusive control of upper castes over ‘means of symbolic production[n]’ (ibid: 7). Caste hierarchies are hierarchies of ritual purity with the Brahmans at the top and the former untouchable communities, that is, the Dalits at the bottom (ibid). It is based on heredity and purity of a group is a function of ‘purity of blood and nature of work.’ Thus ‘*eating, physical contact and marriage* are highly ritualized and strictly confined to other member of each bounded group.’ (ibid: 10, emphasis added) It is important to underscore that in a graded system each caste that experiences exploitation and discrimination also subjects those lower than them in the hierarchy to the same (ibid).

In the thesis I use ‘caste’ to refer to the *varna* system, which, based on Karve (2014) and Chakravarti (2009a) I understand to be a four-tier system (in north India): at the top are the ‘Brahmans’ followed by Kshatriyas, below whom are the Vaishyas, and at the end are the Shudras. The former untouchables, that is, the ‘Dalits’ are considered to be outside the *varna* system; when the Indian constitution was adopted in 1950, untouchability was legally abolished and has since been criminalised though the practice of untouchability continues in parts of the country, including in urban India. Untouchability is the practice of keeping a ritual distance from Dalit individuals – for example, not sitting next to them and most importantly,

not sharing food with them. It was the *varna* system to which some of the teachers explicitly referred in the classroom. Instead of the abovementioned terms from scriptural texts, I have used the terms, Upper Caste (UC) or 'General' (Gen), Scheduled Caste (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in this thesis because within the Indian policy discourse these terms serve significant administrative and classification purposes. The first three groups in the *varna* system – Brahmins, Rajputs and Vaishyas – constitute the so-called 'Upper Castes' while the Shudras constitute the 'Other Backward Classes' and the Dalits, the 'Scheduled Castes'. In the official records of the school students were identified based on these administrative categories; instead of 'upper caste', the administrative term used is, 'General' to represent the fact that students in this category do not benefit from policies of positive discrimination. Post-independence, the Indian state has developed 'equal-opportunity policies' (Thorat and Newman 2013: 6) and formulated 'reservation' (affirmative action or positive discrimination) and welfare policies in order to offer socioeconomic support to traditionally marginalised communities. Lastly, there are also the Adivasi, or, tribal, communities in India who fall under the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category¹⁰. These are also communities identified as socioeconomically marginalised but tribe/ethnicity is not an axis of difference on which I focus in this thesis. However, these are some of the most marginalised groups in contemporary India. I have identified 'ST' students as such throughout the thesis.

Chakravarti emphasises that caste is about more than 'difference' or 'interdependence'; it entails lived realities of 'profound inequality' (p. 11). This is a fundamental insight that must guide all analyses of education policy and practice in India as, historically, lower castes have been sought to be distanced from knowledge and credentials that could help them move up socioeconomically. This is also the

¹⁰ As Sedwal and Kamat (2008: 3-4) note, 'The exclusion of Scheduled Tribes..., is based on a different set of economic and cultural factors that have little to do with caste ideology. Scheduled Tribe groups have traditionally lived in more remote areas of the country and in closer proximity to forests and natural resources. [...] However, modernization and accumulative processes of production have resulted in massive encroachment into their natural habitats. This has in turn resulted in displacement, poverty and heightened levels of exploitation'.

reason intellectuals and leaders like Jyotiba Phule and Bhimrao Ambedkar emphasised formal education for Dalits in colonial/post-independence India (Rege 1998, Venkatesh 2016, Chakravarti 2009a, Pappu and Vasanta 2010). It is no accident that the vast majority of students in the government school system are from non-Brahman castes, particularly Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. In view of the history of caste, educational stratification clearly serves to retain the caste-based educational access and exclusion through formal mass schooling in independent India. This historical continuity adds to both the urgency and difficulty of reversing the neoliberal trend of state withdrawal from education and ensuring meaningfully just education for all children irrespective of sociocultural and economic differences. Chakravarti (2009a: 15) notes that in addition to religious texts, the regulation of female sexuality, distribution of resources like land and linkages with the state, educational stratification plays a crucial role in the reproduction of caste systems through ‘the reproduction of the labouring being *as well as* the reproduction of that person’s subordination.’

In this context an intersectional approach to caste and class based divisions assumes great value. Chakravarti uses the term ‘claste’ to represent this intersection (2009b, 2012) thus capturing the *casted* nature of class difference and conflict in India without losing the analytical significance of either category. This is an important analytical move as Indian scholars have long ignored class analytics (Chibber 2013, Fernandes and Heller 2013) and the importance of intersectional analysis claiming Indian ‘exceptionalism’ as a result of centrality of caste to social organisation. Accordingly, I have adopted the term ‘genderclaste’ (Chakravarti, personal communication) to represent intersections of gender, class and caste in the Indian context.

Lastly, I attend to the historical upper caste ‘monopoly over knowledge’ (Chakravarti 2009a: 16). Initially, “high status” ‘ritual or religious knowledge’ was to be accessible only to the Brahmins; and women, Sudras and Dalit groups were excluded from it. It included “sacred knowledge’, ‘book knowledge’, ‘intellectual inquiries’ like astronomy’ whereas the labouring castes had historically ‘developed and preserved’ all the other knowledge relating to farming, livestock, trees and plants or to crafts like pottery or carpentry and ‘spatial skills like navigation’ which were invariably

categorised as ritually ‘polluting’ and accorded low status. With time this monopoly over knowledge extended to what Chakravarti terms ‘sacred knowledge.’ (ibid: 17) Thus, once again, insight into fundamental principles of caste prove indispensable to analyses of education; for example it gives added urgency to questions like: whose knowledge is it that is in textbooks? How is it presented? Who is credited with having developed or preserved it? How is it made accessible and what is the relative status of all the out-of-school knowledge? I attend to these questions in chapter seven in this thesis.

2.1.3 (Informal working) Class

For the purposes of this thesis I am specifically concerned with the definition, emergence and characterisation of the ‘informal working class’ (IWC) as a category of analysis. My discussion of childhood in this chapter) and my findings¹¹, particularly, the composition of the classroom underscore the importance of attending to the economic and social context and significance of the emergence of the IWC in any analysis of contemporary educational inequality in India. Significantly, the conditions under which these discourses of “childhood” and educational “quality” (Sarangapani 2010) have been circulated and legitimated are also ones under which the informal economy has expanded (Agarwala 2013, Harriss-White 2003, Menon and Nigam 2007, Vasanta 2004).

The informal sector of India is ‘quite difficult to characterise and label’ (Harriss-White 2003: 3) but entails ‘a vast range of small-scale production and trad[e]’ (ibid: 2) and contributes about sixty percent to the National Domestic Product (ibid). For a more specific definition, Agarwala quotes Portes, Castells and Benton (1989):

The informal sector consists of economic units that produce goods and services legally, but engage in operations that are not registered or regulated by fiscal, labor, health, and tax laws. Informal workers include the self-employed, who own and run a business in the informal sector with few or no

¹¹ See chapters 4 and 5.

employees, as well as casual labor, who work through subcontractors either for an informal or a formal sector enterprise. The primary difference between informal and formal workers is that the latter are protected and regulated under state law while the former are not. (Agarwala 2006: 420-421)

Indian economy today employs ninety-three percent of its labour force in the informal sector (Agarwala 2013). Post-liberalisation, that is, since the late-1980s/early 1990s (ibid) the Indian state has systematically undone the contract between itself and workers which had represented 'at the very least, an ideological and material claim to livelihood rights.' (ibid: 189) Since liberalisation this 'informal, unprotected worker' has been established as the desirable ideal for a 'modern and efficient' state (ibid: 189). The national/global economic and social vision that decreed the demolition of the cadre of formal workers, also dictated the systematic and 'unprecedented decline in state welfare rhetoric and policy.' (Agarwala 2006: 419)

Based on the history (since 1980s) of 'parallel labour organisations' in India Agarwala argues that this informal sector is not 'unorganized' (ibid: 190). That is, even though '[c]onventional labour unions' (ibid: 190) and scholars have alike ignored this group and focused on 'corporate, 'metropolitan' India,' (ibid: 3) informal workers are emerging as a class 'in' and 'for' themselves (Agarwala 2006). She also argues that this is a reason to continue developing and honing 'class analytics' (A 2006: 419). Based on my findings I also argue that such an analysis is urgently needed in a scenario where everything from the socioeconomic contexts of students and teachers, overall national development paradigms and education policy and practice are changing in uneven and complex ways. Thus, this thesis contributes to Indian sociology of education in multiple and significant ways.

Lastly, attention to the IWC serves to more systematically understand the exploitation of women and lower caste communities as the IWC draws 'disproportionately from the historically lower castes' who 'are poorer, not necessarily in terms of income but certainly of vulnerability.' (Harriss 2013: 111) Breman (1996) also shows that moving up within an organisation or switching to better paid jobs even within the informal sector, let alone moving into the formal

sector, can be nearly impossible and opportunities are limited. Further, women are not only the first to lose their formal sector jobs their social and domestic roles and status also imply that their labour is available 'unconditionally' (ibid:227) and at wages far lower than what men may demand. Quoting Gail Omvedt, Breman reminds us: 'women are 'the ultimate reserve army of labour' (Breman 1996: 227).

That almost all children's parents were in the informal sector was the most striking aspect of the contemporary urban educational context that I researched; it also turned out to be the aspect that was considered the least in the everyday business of classroom teaching. The material, emotional and symbolic effects of such tremendous insecurity and uncertainty are completely disregarded, part of the reason for which is the individualistic and individualising character of modern formal (mass public) education. The pupil was constantly treated as an autonomous entity rather than a member of a family or a social unit, as if, all concerns that affected the family as a whole, or other members could – indeed, must – be set aside while the child acts out the role of a student. Whether there is enough food or parents are well or not, or the rent is paid or not, a child must revise her lessons every day at home. All this emotional, physical and intellectual effort is expected to be invested in an education that has little to offer the children and their families in terms of long term gain or security. (As Neha, a 14-15 year old ST girl, told me: '*dadi* says, 'what's the point [in schooling] when one never gets a job?')

2.2 Discussing "childhood": educational inequality, (child) labour and the state

In any analysis of gender, class and caste issues in education narratives almost the first thing to capture an ethnographer's attention is the fact that the 'educational ideal' (Kumar 2005) or the normative "child" in these narratives is far removed from the lives of a majority of Indian children, particularly those attending state government schools. In this section I offer a critical review of existing literature on "childhood" in the context of education in India. This review includes both work based on fieldwork with children and commentaries on the context within which the

dominant notion of “childhood” has emerged and the economic and social significance of this conceptualisation. These commentaries, along with discussions of Brahmanical patriarchy and informalisation of Indian economy, forms the theoretical framework for analysis of “childhoods” in this thesis.

Raman (2000) and Balagopalan (2014) argue that the normative notion of childhood underpinning policy and practice excludes the diverse realities of large numbers of school students in India, particularly girls (NCERT 2006) and students from marginalised class, religious and caste groups, that is, the majority of students attending state government schools (Pappu and Vasanta 2010). I use critiques of this normative notion to outline a framework for grappling with ethnographic data that sheds light on the everyday lives of students in my research. The following excerpt articulates a critique of the dominant notion of childhood:

‘Ever since the Kothari Commission report of 1966 emphasised the processes of nation-building and modernisation, the assumption of the male child as the prime mover of national development has tended to dominate both thinking in relation to the school curriculum, as well as its translation into the language and ideology of textbooks.⁵⁰

[...]

It is the male middle class child again who comes closest to conforming to the hegemonic notions of ideal childhood, one in which the child is in school and not at work, is carefree, at play and sheltered from the sordid facts of adult life.’

~ NCERT (2006: 21).

Sarada Balagopalan has done pioneering work in critiquing the normative notion of childhood and the way it is deployed to justify international developmental approaches. Balagopalan is the only scholar to have explicitly done research with children as part of her critique of the normative notion of “childhood” (2002, 2014). However, Vasanta and Pappu’s (2010) study is closer to my own work as it systematically engages students’ overall institutional and social context of learning, especially focusing on the gendered burden of work borne by adolescent girls. Vasanta (2004) historicises the focus on the individual child in Indian policy discourse

and locates current discourses of childhood within contemporary international economic relations. Raman's (2000) work, though not based on field research, is a vital contribution to the discussion on childhood offering a more complete picture of the everyday, legal and policy implications of what the 'hegemonic ideal' (Balagopalan 2002) of childhood implies. Raman systematically outlines factors influencing contemporary incidence and form of child labour, which range from poverty to structural adjustment programmes and India's colonial history, as well as the consequences of child labour. Raman (2000) powerfully articulates the need to come up with a broad outline for policy change focusing not only on education and child-labour but several other areas of life, especially, India's labour laws, the neoliberal development paradigm, food security and health care. I draw upon Raman (ibid) and Vasanta (2004) in order to grapple with their school experiences in terms of reproduction of particular set of social relations and to flesh out a theoretical framework that allows me to critically engage intersecting power structures within the contemporary (inter)national social and economic scenario.

Vasanta (2004) and Balagopalan (2014) show that child labour in contemporary India is something that is constitutive of India's economic growth and vision and 'which [the state] deliberately helps produce.' (Balagopalan 2014: 107) If 'colonial capitalism in India transformed children's household work (an integral part of early childhood socialization practices) into wage labour[r]' (Balagopalan 2002: 29) the upper caste middle class elite of post-independence India also displayed greater anxiety for 'industrial development' than for the welfare needs of '[t]he labouring child' (ibid: 98). Thus existing literature, specifically, Raman (2000), Vasanta (2004), Balagopalan (2002, 2014) also historicise the relationship between educational exclusion and child labour in colonial and post-independence India. By exclusion I refer to lack of access to education and access to non-formal or low quality education and exclusion of these children's life-worlds from standardised curricula. The idea is that the industrialisation and modernisation could only 'accommodate' some (privileged) communities and that poor children have to work to supplement family incomes (Balagopalan 2014: 98).

Balagopalan (2002: 20) argues that the dominant understanding of childhood follows a 'western bourgeois concept' in the contemporary context and has been circulated

internationally through policies of international aid agencies and campaigns by NGOs (Balagopalan 2003, 2008; Raman 2000), particularly 'in order to distribute and monitor their funds.' (Vasanta 2004: 16) Examples of such campaigns and discourses include the 'Child Rights and You' (CRY) campaign and the international 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' (CRC) ratified by the government of India in 1992. Balagopalan specifically deconstructs the child labour/school binary arguing against projecting "schooling" as an escape from child labour. She shows that street children (working as child labourers) are able to make sense of their lives and opportunities and choose to reject vocational and nonformal education as they perceive this to be inferior to formal education (Balagopalan 2002, 2008). She instead argues that these children's realities – concerns and rights both as children and workers – should guide policy making. In chapter four I engage some of the central features of IWC children's lives and their gendered implications for education.

While Balagopalan supports the idea of child rights and exhorts the state not to abdicate its responsibility her support for the idea of multiple childhoods is in contradiction with Kumar's (2010) arguments for holding on to a modernist lens in the interests of equal rights for girl children in India. His concern is that the notion of multiple childhoods could become an excuse for the Indian state and international agencies to allow multiple standards of education to flourish. Vasanta (2004) and Raman (2000) help resolve this contradiction: their analyses enable a research agenda that interrogates conceptions of childhood and classroom experiences of impoverished children with reference to local and global social relations of production and reproduction. Such an approach will interrogate and challenge both, policies that force increasing numbers of children into labour and offers them inferior quality education (Velaskar 2010, Balagopalan 2002, Pappu and Vasanta 2010).

Most importantly, while the poor and/or labouring child has increasingly emerged as the sole focus of education policy discourse in countries like India – in both discussions of inequality in education (Pappu and Vasanta 2010, Pappu 2002) and "quality" (Sarangapani 2010, Pappu and Vasanta 2010), it is precisely this child's life that is farthest removed from the assumptions underpinning practice. Though state government schools are not non-formal channels of education, the unacceptable

stratification of India's school system allows the state to both ignore poor and working children's lives and offer them low quality education that systematically denies them upward mobility.

2.2.1 Gaps in the literature

Balogopalan's work rarely engages the gendered nature of "child labour" and "childhoods", though she makes a case for a feminist critique of the state which focuses on children instead of adults (Balogopalan 2002). If the focus remains on wage labour outside the home, then the historical experiences of a majority of Indian girls stand ignored. While there are some studies that document the implications of girls' labour for their schooling (Jha and Jhingaran 2002, Saxena et al. 2009) there is little ethnographic work offering in-depth analysis of adolescent girls' experience of non-waged labour at home, participation in wage labour or its impact on their education. Similarly, literature on childhood is yet to take caste systematically into account in terms of its effects on families' socioeconomic circumstances or children's experience of labouring and learning.

Engendering discussions of childhood in India *through research with children* can only be found in Pappu and Vasanta's (2010) study with 300 students in and around Hyderabad. This work, whilst not ethnographic, attended to both home and school aspects of adolescent students' lives and helped me identify aspects of children's lives that merit closer scrutiny, namely, curriculum, classroom processes and teacher student interaction, family background and living conditions. This thesis adds to their work and its central contribution is its focus on intersectional power relations and accounts of resistance; there is limited work with schoolboys which is another gap it addresses. I explicitly focus not only on inequality *in* education but also on inequality *through* education. Further, I offer close engagement with dominant understandings of official knowledge and views of marginalised communities as intellectually less capable. On the basis of Pappu and Vasanta's arguments (and drawing upon other research I shortly review) I also link neoliberal discourses of "quality" (Soudien et al. 2012) to educational stratification arguing that curriculum and pedagogy cannot be reimagined without a corresponding financial and political

commitment to transforming school infrastructure in order to offer better quality education to poor children and/or first generation learners, especially girls.

Another aspect which merits much greater and systematic attention through classroom studies, is the social relationship between students and teachers. Pappu and Vasanta (ibid) critique the “morally superior” stand that teachers take towards students getting “free” books or uniforms, besides considering these students ‘as ‘unteachables’.’ (ibid: 6) The authors show that these views of their own inability are also internalised by some of the students. I takes these views up in my analysis of empirical data in later chapters.

Peggy Froerer’s (2012) work on gender relations in wider society specifically, their implications for girls’ education takes an anthropological approach that offers greater details of girls’ everyday life and how it shapes time for, and meaning of, education for girls. My work in this thesis, instead, confronts accounts of children’s lives outside school with their experience of classroom texts and practices in an effort to understand how genderclaste differences and inequalities come to be in *and* through education. I also try to understand aspects of education that reinforce patriarchal practices and attitudes and/or help girls challenge these. In the following sections I look at literature and additional theoretical frameworks for interrogating classroom texts and practices.

2.3 Pedagogic principles and (re)production

Pedagogic processes are central to classroom experience and in this section I look at insights from existing literature on pedagogic practice in Indian classrooms. In this thesis I aim to understand how genderclaste relations inscribe pedagogic practice in order to understand how classroom social relations and teaching learning processes enable and/or limit possibilities for (re)producing historically specific power relations. Existing literature on education of Black and working class children in the UK and the USA shows that teachers’ view of students and their abilities and background affects both teaching practice and students’ success, motivation and performance (Mirza 1992, Connell 1982, Delpit 1995, Lankshear 1997, Lipman 1998,

Gillborn 1990). Some Indian scholarship has also reported teachers' attitudes toward working class and "lower" caste children (Nambissan 1996, Sriprakash 2012, Murali Krishna, Page 2005, Balagopalan and Subrahmanian 2002, Jeffery et al.). However, rarely have ethnographic details of teacher-student interaction been offered, especially implications of teacher attitudes for classroom teaching-learning and overall (re)production of dominant social relations in and through schooling. Of the existing studies four are particularly relevant to this thesis: Aarathi Sriprakash's (2012) work on child-centred pedagogic reforms in primary schools, in Padma Sarangapani's (2003b) work on the construction of knowledge in primary schools and Elspeth Page's (2005) work on attitudes and practices regarding gender issues in government schools in central India. The fourth, Pappu and Vasanta's (2010) study has already been discussed and is the closest to my work in terms of its political concerns and classroom processes covered.

2.3.1 Understanding policy, practice and teachers' work

While Sriprakash (2012) and Page (2005) offer insights into the institutional, policy and social context of teaching and learning Sarangapani (2003b) takes a closer look at the construction and regulation of knowledge. Page's is the most extensive study in terms of number of aspects of school education covered but its disciplinary location in development studies rather than in sociology of education limits her analysis of how gendercaste relations and identities operate in classrooms. Her objective was to survey and analyse attitudes and practices relating to girls' education and empowerment among families, teachers and girls themselves in a small town in Madhya Pradesh. It 'is loosely framed within the capability approach of Amartya Sen and the social embodiment paradigm of Robert Connell, and draws insights from feminist, reproduction and critical social theory.' (Page 2005: 16)

Page's primary contribution is her detailing of the policy and institutional context of teachers' work and their working conditions and self-image. She shows that this context is characterised by teachers' low position in the hierarchy, often their low self-esteem, 'data demands' in the SSA programme, the state's refusal to appoint full-time regular teachers, stratification and division of the teacher cadre, as well as

an informal system of (gendered) patronage by bureaucrats. Page also drew upon interviews with some bureaucrats and teachers and classroom observations in order to understand the way education policy and teachers' views and attitudes shaped their practice. Her identification of overall patterns in teacher attitudes and practices and students' attitudes and views on teaching and curricula offer grounds for further analysis such as this thesis provides.

Many of her findings regarding teachers' views of students and parents (in line with the deficit model) support mine and I further her critique of teachers' views through a closer analysis of everyday teacher-pupil interaction. Her findings regarding students' view of curricula and teachers/teaching-methods are also useful because one of the schools she researched had been using alternative pedagogy and curricula during part of her fieldwork. For example, she shows that Class VIII girls were happier with the alternative curricula that did not require memorisation unlike the state specified curriculum which students could not negotiate on their own; they had to rely on cheating, tuitions and even bribery to clear exams. Such findings offered me grounds for a closer look at curricula and pedagogy to ascertain exactly what aspects prove problematic for students in a government school; and further, how difficulties in learning reproduce caste stratification through education. Secondly, she found that the only teacher who consistently challenged gender biases in the school was one who continued to practice the alternative teaching-learning approaches that were dropped after a point by other teachers under instructions from the state government. This finding underscored the importance of pedagogy and curriculum in challenging existing social relations.

In contrast to Page, Sarangapani (2003a) zeroes in on a single aspect of classrooms: she looks at classroom pedagogic processes in order to understand what constitutes teaching and learning in a north Indian village, processes involved in transaction of curricular knowledge in the classroom and how children construct knowledge. However, her theoretical and political concerns do not relate to inequalities in or through education except those between the institutional positions of students and teachers vis. a vis. each other. Rather she works within a theoretical framework dealing with epistemology and focuses on how children make meaning of schooling, school or official knowledge and the respective values of the two.

Sarangapani's work offers a useful framework for discussing the conceptualisation of teaching and learning in most Indian schools as it offers insights into everyday practices of rote, memorisation, teaching, that is, doing lessons, exercises and revision work. Further, she contextualises the relationship between 'the teacher and the taught' with respect to local cultural understandings of what it means to be a child and the adult-child and traditional *guru-shishya* (master-disciple) relationships. Sarangapani (2003b: 405) brings out the context in which 'the nature of [teacher's] authority [...] is naturalized into a taken-for-granted feature.' She argues that teacher-pupil relationship is 'predetermined' by the adult-child relationship in larger society, which required children to compulsorily respect adults. Similarly, the 'parent-offspring/child' relationship within a patriarchal setup which gives 'absolute authority over the child' to the adult/parent also infuses the teacher-pupil relationship extending to the parent/teacher/adult the right to subject the offspring/pupil/child to corporal punishment (ibid: 405).

This layered teacher-pupil relationship was reflected in teachers' conversations in my research as well. The third contributing relationship of *guru-sishya* demanded 'complete surrender of the *sishya's* will to the *guru's* sacred authority.' (ibid: 406) I supplement this understanding of teacher-pupil relationships with Rancièrian insights (discussed in the next section) into the 'subordination' of pupils' intelligence in order to better understand classroom dynamics in a context characterised by caste distances between teachers and students.

For my sociological analysis of pedagogic practices I find Sriprakash's work most relevant. Her interrogation of 'child-centred pedagogic reforms' (Sriprakash 2012: 47) in a rural, government primary school addresses some of the gaps in Sarangapani's work by scrutinising the social context of pedagogic practice and helps understand how pedagogic practice is shaped by social class differences between teachers and students on the one hand, and by policy contexts and curricular form and technical controls, on the other. Such an appreciation and interrogation of the interrelations of various aspects of classroom processes is rare in Indian sociology of education. I draw upon her analysis in order to understand teachers' construction of their moral authority vis. a vis. students and 'uneducated' communities (chapter five), and interrogate linkages between policy and practice in classrooms (chapter

seven). Despite the overall policy rhetoric she finds that social relations and curricular form shaped practice in ways that replicate traditional pedagogic practices and student-teacher relations: focus on pace of learning, hitting children to ensure that they learn, 'oral and written testing and daily 'copy-writing'¹² homework tasks.' (Sriprakash 2012: 117)

Sriprakash's analysis of teachers' moral position shows that teachers' construction of the educated teacher/uneducated community binary also incorporates elements of caste biases and hierarchies. Sriprakash's findings regarding rural teachers' views support mine; this similarity assumes significance because my research context was urban and there is a widespread understanding in public discourses that caste biases and discrimination are much stronger in rural areas compared to urban areas (Fernandes and Heller 2013 also dispute this claim). Yet, these biases show up regularly in classrooms necessitating an ongoing engagement with intersections of class and caste as these manifest in classroom discourses. My thesis undertakes a more systematic, intersectional analysis of genderclaste relations inscribed in classroom processes.

The primary difference between Sriprakash' and my work is that she engages with classroom processes in the specific context of child-centred reforms at the level of primary schools. Thus her work focuses more on divergences and convergences between policy provisions and practice whereas I set out to interrogate how classroom texts and practices specifically (re)produce genderclaste relations. However, her work encouraged me to take into account the ways in which neoliberal reforms in education shape curriculum and assessment (chapter seven). As I show, there is urgent need for ongoing documentation and critique of policy moves and corresponding shifts in classroom practice on a state-wise basis in India. Sriprakash's findings support my focus on multiple aspects of students' classroom experience in addition to systematic references to the larger social context and show that addressing only one aspect of education will not adequately resolve issues of

¹² Copy-writing is a peculiarly Indian practice; it involves copying lessons and/or answers to exercises at the end of lessons in order to memorise these texts and develop the capacity to reproduce these on tests.

genderclaste biases and discrimination. Policy rhetoric around educational change is insufficient unless teachers have more freedom, there is less curricular control and standardisation and teachers are equipped to reflect on their own sociocultural biases.

Since none of the scholars discussed above systematically theorise processes of reproduction of claste relations in classrooms, or challenges to these, I develop a theoretical framework that builds on a critique of the 'deficit model' (Wesley 1977, Lipman 1998) and Rancière's conceptualisation of 'stultification' (Rancière 1991) in order to do so. Using this framework I build on Sriprakash's and Sarangapani's arguments to show that classroom processes do not only regulate knowledge and teaching learning practices, but also claste relations by denying students' intellectual ability (chapter five).

2.3.2 Theorising social class inequalities: the 'deficit model'

In order to theorise aspects of social class inequality with respect to classroom processes, I draw upon the notion of deficit model used by Pauline Lipman in her analysis of school restructuring and its impact on the schooling of African American students in the USA (Lipman 1998). Lipman (2004: 49) traces the idea to the work of Wesley Becker (1977: 521). The idea of the 'deficit model' exposes the view of 'the educational experiences and the disproportionately low academic performance of children of color' held by those in charge of education practice and policy that lays the "blame" for low achievement at the door of 'families and communities' (Lipman 1998: 71). It distances teachers from students and explicitly attaches the blame to these students for what is seen as their tardiness, disobedience and disorderliness as well as low motivation and ability (Keddie 1971).

Like Lipman I also view education as necessarily a process involving 'cultural change' (Lipman 1998: 72), that is, a process which for students, involves learning (Lankshear 1997) and (re)making (Bruner 1986) the 'culture of power' (Delpit 1995) that is, the dominant ways of being, talking and thinking at school. In the Indian context dominant school culture has historically been shaped, to a large extent, by elite Hindu men as Kumar (2005) has powerfully established. Education entails students

learning and/or challenging the culture of power; and to understand the im/possibilities of both these processes it is important to understand exactly what happens in the classroom: that is, what social relations are enabled, challenged and/or perpetuated in/through teaching and learning practices (chapter five). Thus, the deficit model clearly offers a relevant analytical framework to unpack teachers' practices and attitudes towards IWC students.

Deficit view of students/communities frees teachers and policymakers of responsibility. Not only is pupils' performance blamed on their "deficient" cultural backgrounds, but as my findings show (Sriprakash 2012 also observes this) teachers often assign the responsibility for the low performance of government schools (as compared to private schools) to impoverished students and families; that is, the deficit model is also used to explain the failure of the system in the Indian context. Lipman (1998: 75) observes: '...what distinguished educators with a deficit explanation was that economic and social conditions were grounds for low expectations and for not considering how to improve students' educational experiences and academic performance, and these conditions were linked in educators' cultural models with social and moral pathologies.' Thus, the deficit model allows teachers not to work on their own knowledge, or pedagogy, or, be critical of school infrastructure. Teachers' deficit view of IWC students in India constitutes the 'police logic' (Rancière 2010) of the school that renders students' abilities, concerns and constraints *insensible* to teachers. There is a refusal to *see* differently (ibid), that is, to see beyond the deficit model and learn to understand and identify abilities, values and worldviews that these students contribute to, and develop, through classroom discourses.

As Lipman recognizes, the deficit model is very powerful and 'its ramifications... complex' (ibid: 75). Like race, caste in this case, is 'tacitly' (ibid: 76) implied while class was more openly discussed ("labour class"). The deficit model reflects and institutionalises caste-based *othering*, in the process rendering IWC students undeserving of concern, empathy and care. This does not mean that teachers did not try to teach these students. However, while there was amused tolerance at times, there was hardly any empathy or excitement at the kinds of persons the students were, or could be. Teachers did not feel the need to get to know students as learners

or human beings let alone critique the lack of space to do so. Lipman also points to the lower expectations from Black students in her research which is relevant for analyses of policy and practice. As I show, both teachers (chapter five) and policy makers (chapter seven) expect little from IWC students. Lipman (ibid: 82) notes: 'In general, the deficit model was reflected in lower expectations for academic performance, a watered-down curriculum, more rote learning, and an emphasis on controlling behaviour.'

While the deficit model helps theorise teachers' views and how they treat students, I find Rancière's conceptualisation of political subjectification and his 'thesis of equality' useful in systematically recognising students' efforts and investments as well as their significance for reimagining educational policy and practice.

2.3.3 Theorising intellectual (in)equality and 'stultifying' pedagogies using Rancière

The thesis of intellectual equality lies at the heart of Rancière's work. For Rancière, equality is the beginning, not the goal. 'Equality is not a value to which one appeals; it is a universal that must be supposed, verified, and demonstrated in each case.' (Rancière 1992: 60) At the root of Rancière's thesis is the idea that all human beings are intellectually equal and therefore do not need someone else to explain their oppression to them. He was writing in the context of post-1968 France and intervening on Louise Althusser's and Pierre Bourdieu's theories of student uprisings (Ross 1991). Rancière argued against the hierarchies of knowledge that valued theoretical production by scholars more than knowledge produced in contexts of practices by, say, working class students or workers writing poetry at night.

Rancière argued that disciplines (Philosophy, Sociology) need 'the division between mental and manual labor' for their own success (ibid: 66) and opposed Bourdieu's twin ideas that the 'system reproduces its existence because it goes un-recognised' and that it 'brings about, through the reproduction of its existence, an effect of misrecognition'. (ibid: 61). Rancière's opposition to these hierarchies of intellectual ability and production was linked to his more general critique of the idea of explanation, or, explication. He used the experiences of Joseph Jacotot, an

eighteenth century French professor, to intervene on discourses around education in late twentieth century France (Rancière 1991, Bingham and Biesta 2010). Like most other teachers, Jacotot had also believed that ‘the essential act of the master was to *explicate*’ (Rancière 1991: 3; emphasis in original). However, the French-speaking professor’s experience of teaching Flemish-speaking students revolutionised his thinking as they did not have a language in common. He could not explain anything to his students in Flemish or French, but as Rancière (ibid: 4) notes, the latter went on to learn French and rendered, ‘the schoolmaster’s explications therefore superfluous’. Thus Joseph Jacotot concluded from this *expérience*¹³ that ‘All people are equally intelligent..... [and] that knowledge is not necessary to teaching, nor explication necessary to learning.’ (Ross 1991: 67). Jacotot’s *expérience*, thus, raised questions about the role of the teacher or ‘schoolmaster’ problematizing, and opening up new ways of understanding, the relationship between will, intelligence and knowledge. For Rancière/Jacotot the teacher’s job was to dismantle the relationship between two intelligences and instead establish one between two wills – that of the teacher’s and the student’s. The idea of ‘will’ here is very crucial: the teacher is only ‘a will that sets the ignorant person down a path, that is, to say to instigate a capacity already possessed...’ (Bingham and Biesta 2010: 2-3).

Rancière claimed that when one person explains something to another, the latter’s intelligence is ‘subordinated’ to the former’s (Rancière 1991: 13) and subordination is what he called ‘stultification’. Thus, Rancière is critical of what he calls ‘the explicative order’ (1991: 4) which establishes the infinite loop of explanation: the teacher explains the book, and then what the teacher says needs explanation and so on. Interestingly, in Hindi – the medium of instruction in Madhya Pradesh – the words for the two are actually born from the same root word: *samajhanaa* is ‘to understand’ whereas *samjhaanaa* is ‘to explain’ and *samajh* is ‘understanding’. So understanding and explanation are intimately and deeply linked to each other. Rancière also points out that when there is the complaint that children do not

¹³ In French the same word is used for both ‘experience’ and ‘experiment’ (Ross 1991).

understand, the idea is to simplify explanations further. 'Before being the act of the pedagogue, explication is the myth of pedagogy...' (Rancière 1991: 6). This 'pedagogical myth...divides intelligence into two. It says that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one.' (ibid: 7)

Instead, Rancière argues that we assume equality; that is, we assume that all intelligences are equal and equally capable of understanding without explanation, that to which they bring their attention. He argues that the way children learn language – through repetition, imitation & comparison (ibid) – is the way they might well be able to make sense of everything else on their own. Through the idea of 'poetics of knowledge' (Rancière 2011: 14), he argues that from glove-making to poetry and philosophy, everything is the work of the same intelligence (Rancière 1991, 2009).

His critique of the explicative order was also a critique of the trickledown theory of formal education, particularly, for the education of poor children, on which the state and society are disinclined to spend adequately. So, Rancière (1991: 17) notes that what is on offer for socioeconomically marginalised students is greater simplification and greater explanation with the hope that learning, '[h]appiness and liberty would trickle down'. Rancière (ibid: 17) further notes,

'That sort of progress, for Jacotot, smelled of the bridle...His own problem was that of *emancipation*: that every common person might conceive his human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it.' (Emphasis in the original)

According to Rancière, learning entails each individual following their own path; that is, knowing and listening to what one is capable of and not being afraid of trying out that path (ibid); thus, 'diverging from, leaving one's path' is the problem, not stumbling while trying to follow one's path. This notion of following diverse paths to the same goal – understanding a poem, or solving a differential equation, 'to the truth' – makes sense when one assumes that all intelligences are equal and equally capable of making sense of what they hear, read or see. Thus, every individual has her own orbit – the route she takes to understand the truth and put her intelligence to use as she likes. These orbits cannot be identical for any two persons and that is

why expecting and forcing all children to, for example, learn in the same way, to have the same relationship with the truth, only implies 'stultification' (ibid: 57-59).

2.4 Moral curriculum and (re)production

Existing scholarship, for example, Bhattacharjee (1999), refers to some of the issues discussed in chapter six as 'hidden curriculum'. However, I found the entire discourse around genderclaste identities, images and relationships so striking, that I felt the need for a stronger term to adequately articulate the moral discourse and the dominant sense of "right" and "wrong" that emerged in that discourse. Equally important, this agenda was usually not 'hidden'; it was often explicitly and systematically articulated and often, so were its genderclaste underpinnings. As I show in the following review of literature existing scholarship does not fully capture the intersections of gender class and caste or the impact of these intersections on social relations in the classroom, particularly caste and class. This scholarship also does not engage what it terms the hidden curriculum in terms of (re)production of particular social relations. As my analysis in chapter six shows there is every need for such an engagement as well as a more systematic theorisation of instances of subjectification, particularly, resistance.

2.4.1 Discipline and moral policing in Indian classrooms

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the work of Sriprakash (2012) and Page (2005), both of whom found teachers' views toward students from marginalised castes and classes to be similar to what I found: that parents do not care for their children's education and are irresponsible and unreliable in terms of offering support needed to succeed at school. While Sriprakash found this from teachers' interviews Page's findings came from talking to both students and teachers; Page also discusses some instances of resistance toward larger social practices around caste-based discrimination. Page argues that the class difference was so crucial that despite some similarities in experiences on the basis of their gender, women teachers and girls could not use these common experiences as a basis to relate to each other in mutually empowering ways. I build on these and a few other studies to develop a

more nuanced view of classroom interactions and dominant moralities that emerge in this interaction. To that end I focus on the ways students are constructed as belonging to particular classes, castes and religions (within the ideology of religious nationalism), often in gendered ways, as well as on how students contest and negotiate these constructions.

There are three kinds of literature relating to these themes: the largest body focuses on the representation and construction of citizenship and religious nationalism in textbooks and through school rituals and teachers' talk (Benei 2008, 2009; Sarkar 1994; Sundar 2004; Thapan 2006) but not on classroom experiences of Muslim students. However, I offer only a brief review of this literature as the discussion of religious nationalism is a lesser focus compared to that of genderclaste relations in this thesis; this is so precisely because the former has been paid much greater attention by education scholars compared to the latter. Experiences of girls, Dalit students and Muslim minority students have rarely been researched in the Indian context; the only detailed accounts are actually autobiographical ones, namely, Murali Krishna (2012) on being a Dalit student in a school¹⁴ and Razzack (1991) on being a Muslim one. I draw upon these accounts of being silenced, stereotyped and thus marginalised and discriminated against, in my analysis of Dalit and Muslim students' experiences in the classroom (chapter 6).

Sundar (2004) reviews textbooks in a RSS school in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh and offers ethnographic account of school rituals that emphasise India as a Hindu country and seek to propagate right wing nationalist ideologies. Benei (2008) focuses on how the nation comes to be 'embodied' through religious nationalist discourses in a range of schools in the south western state of Maharashtra, India. Her account also locates these processes in local discourses beyond the school. Thapan's (2006) classroom study interrogates middle class students' understanding of citizenship education in a north Indian private school and Hindu/Indian nationalism and their construction of Pakistan as the Muslim "other".

¹⁴ There are other accounts of Dalit individuals' experiences of formal education: for example, Baby Kamble's autobiographical *The Prisons We Broke* and Rege's biographical, *Writing caste/Writing gender*.

Working within a Foucauldian framework Thapan focuses on disciplinary processes and the way students make sense of the (at times, contradictory) multiple discourses they participate in – classroom, home and media. She is the only one to explicitly make use of Foucault's 'technologies of the self' (Thapan 2006: 4196) though Alam (2013), Froerer (2007) and Bhattacharjee (1999) also offer accounts of how students turn themselves into certain kinds of subjects, without explicitly referring to Foucauldian understandings of self-formation.

Like Froerer (2007), Thapan (2006) also argues that irrespective of the intentions and ideologies of teachers students make sense of ideas presented in the classroom in their own complex and contradictory ways. Froerer (2007) shows that despite the Hindutva ideologies underpinning school processes and explicitly expressed in teachers' conversations, students at the *Saraswati Shishu Mandir* (a school run by the RSS) often view physical discipline as important to future academic success rather than to their becoming good Hindus. She also shows that with age, the Hindutva views may also become strongly ingrained, but it should not be assumed that just because an ideology is being conveyed students will (fully) buy into it. This is the importance of attending to 'student perspectives' that Froerer underlines; she critiques previous studies (Sarkar 1994, Sundar 2004, Benei 2008) for ignoring these perspectives. For example, I found that irrespective of the penetration of RSS ideologies into neighbourhoods and classrooms, students formed and maintained friendships across divisions of religion and caste (discussed in chapters four and six).

Another insightful argument Froerer makes is the need to look at the "banal Hinduism" (Billig 1995) of state government schools (Froerer 2007: 1067). I also found that discussions of moral sensibilities and discipline were often examined in institutions with explicitly religious ideologies (Alam 2013, Sarkar 1994, Sundar 2004; Benei looks at both secular and religious institutions). Froerer also discusses in great detail – like Alam 2013 – processes of physical and bodily discipline: 'the pedagogical focus that revolves around physical discipline and is primarily concerned with the creation of docile bodies is almost entirely devoid of any obvious ideological content.' (2007: 1053) This is where my thesis diverges from Froerer's arguments: I found (I suggest due to the caste differences between students and teachers) that in the classroom I researched the 'pedagogical focus' incorporated a moral agenda as well.

I suggest that the degree of contempt and callousness (for example, how brutally the kids were hit, what language was used to berate them, or, the nature of references to their parents) observed in the classroom was often, primarily, a function of the sociocultural locations of the students.

Though Froerer did not use a Foucauldian framework what she described based on student interviews were instances of governmental subjectivation: students appropriating ideas around academic “success” and being a “good” student. Similarly, Alam (2013) does not specifically theorise student subjectivities and instances of subjectification but discusses in great detail disciplinary and objectifying practices in a *Madrasa* for young Muslim boys that seek to ‘control’ young students’ minds and ‘discipline their bodies (p. 224). He interrogates spatial organization and structures; such as the high boundary wall and the gate as well as allotment of rooms/space to students that ‘mak[e] ‘visible’ each and every aspect of students’ movement (*sic*)’. (ibid: 232) He discusses practices like being taught to respect those older than one, whether senior students or teachers and *maulvis*¹⁵. Like Sarangapani (2003) he also notes that at the *Madrasa* too, age-based social structures and hierarchies are central disciplinary mechanisms and finds that the equation with the patriarchal family is vital to maintenance of discipline: ‘the madrasa is like a family. Within the family, the argument goes, there are elder brothers and father who have to be obeyed.’ The difference is that being based on a religious identity, at the *Madrasa*, educational goals include ‘development of a communal/communitarian identity’ as opposed to an “individuating” one (ibid: 233).

Alam also shows that organisation of space and time are important mechanisms for controlling students’ bodies and behaviours which is also central to educational systems – (comportment, ways of dressing, personal hygiene) (ibid). He also found that both disciplining and being disciplined were explicitly linked by the *Maulvis* and the students to social status: strict discipline makes this *Madrasa* better and the ‘poor and low caste’ students at the institution find that knowing how to behave in a ‘civil’ manner brings them higher social status. (ibid: 239-240). Again, though class

¹⁵ Maulvis are Islamic scholars. Here, the term refers to scholars who are also teachers in the *Madrasa*.

and caste are mentioned the impact of these social hierarchies is not detailed or theorised in his narrative of disciplinary power. However, existing scholarship has begun to attend to narratives of negotiation and my work in this thesis furthers this trend, particularly following on Bhattacharjee's (1999) work on 'gender codes' in primary schools in western India (Gujarat).

Bhattacharjee's (1999: 337) study focuses on students' understanding of 'gender as a dimension of social relations and social organizations' and their construction of "masculinity" and "femininity" through 'the hidden curriculum of gender.' Using Macdonald's (1980) formulation of the 'gender code', Bhattacharjee analyses classroom observations and student interviews. Her work remains a rare feminist sociological engagement with children's agency, specifically, their 'active' negotiation of "'normal'" "girls" and "boys". (Bhattacharjee 1999: 337).

She mentions that these students were migrants from neighbouring states and were 'first-generation learners' and their parents were in the informal sector but beyond a mention of working class boys being seen by teachers as threatening and undeserving, does not analyse the impact of class and caste locations on constructions of gender identities and relationships in the classroom. Bhattacharjee (ibid: 339) found that gender was an organizational principle of space and girls' and boys' spaces were clearly marked and separated: 'The motif of "gendered spaces" within the classroom (and playground) pervaded all my observations, as well as children's interpretations of cross-sex interactions.' Most importantly, based on conversations with girls as well as observations, she argues that this responsibility for 'management' and 'minding' was a continuation of the 'agenda of domestication' (ibid: 342) of girls at home. They had to mind younger siblings at home. She also shows that some students had 'internalized' such gender based division of roles and responsibilities and the associated meanings of masculinity and femininity (ibid: 343).

Expectations of 'good behavior' from girls meant that they were the bearers of the "ideal" student. They had to hold up the ideal, enact it (ibid: 345) which also meant that teachers often berated boys for being disorderly and not good at studies; just as girls were expected to manage and be neat, boys were expected to indulge

in/enact “‘innate” aggressive masculinity’. Being “good” students and “good” girls, in turn, afforded the girls opportunities to be in teachers’ good books while ‘d[oing] just as they liked,’ for example, ignoring classroom studies to knit, draw, crochet and so on under the less strict teachers. (ibid: 346) Thus observing the most important rule of following the gender code allowed girls to get away with breaking other rules. However, Bhattacharjee also points out that this school experience does not help break the gender codes because there are no opportunities for working or playing together and the distance and segregation was reinforced by ‘[p]eer pressure and disapproval’ (ibid: 348). Lastly, she also found teachers saying to the students that girls and boys were like sisters and brothers to each other and insightfully adds, “‘Equality” is not the cultural message here: sisters have a subordinate position in the power structure of the family.’ (ibid: 352)

I use Bhattacharjee’s insights in this thesis to critically analyse moral policing of gender images and relationships in the classroom and further her work through a more explicit and systematic engagement with instances of negotiation and contestation of dominant genderclaste images and relationships by students. Thus existing scholarship on what I term ‘moral curriculum’ offers reasons to use a theoretical framework more explicitly geared toward understanding subjectification; specifically, I deploy a framework that combines insights from Michel Foucault’s and Jacques Rancière’s work. Further my thesis also takes care of the gap in this scholarship regarding theorisation of class and caste relations in the classroom.

2.5 Governmental and political subjectivation: a framework for understanding contestation and negotiation in classrooms

According to Foucault’s conceptualisation, ‘power is exercised rather than possesse[d]’ (Foucault 1991: 26). Thus, his very terms of engagement with power direct our attention to *practices*, rather than static concepts of hierarchies and the positions of individuals and groups within these hierarchies. Even though patriarchy or casteism may exist as codes or structures prescribing a certain distribution of statuses, responsibilities and relationships, to be effective these codes need to be

constantly '*fixed*' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) or negotiated through everyday practices. An exclusive focus on structures makes us lose sight of both, the practices that seek to impose structures as well as the practices that seek to make sense of, and variously accommodate or resist, this imposition. In other words, a Foucauldian view allows us to appreciate the *productive* nature of power and the way power relations both constrain and enable subjects (Youdell 2006). Thus, a Foucauldian approach to understanding power relations allows us to see that power structures do not *pre-exist* any more than subjects do (ibid, Foucault 1982). Structures are imposed through practices and are revealed in these practices.

Focussing simultaneously on the multiple structures of power discussed earlier (genderclaste) and the productive aspect of power can elicit important insights into how power relations come to be negotiated and contested in historically specific ways in everyday institutional settings. Such a theoretical framework allows me to grapple with both, the specific nature of oppressions experienced by various groups, and the im/possibilities of intervening in oppressive practices and relations (whether attempted by students, researchers or policy makers). As I show in this thesis (particularly in chapters four and five), deploying a Foucauldian framework to scrutinise the nitty-gritty of everyday classroom experience helps make sense of how genderclaste relations come into being and produce certain kinds of subjects through classroom texts and processes.

'The use of post-structural ideas may seem at odds with a concern with educational inequalities and exclusions. [...] Yet [...] post-structural ideas do not come out of a rejection of concerns with material conditions. Rather, they come out of a recognition that existing structural understandings of the world, whether these focus on economic, social, ideological, or linguistic structures, do not offer all the tools that we need. In supplementing these tools, Foucault's work reconfigures how we understand history, knowledge, the subject, and power. [...] These ideas help us better understand how practices – located and real and constrained – make some things possible, or even likely, and other things all but impossible.' (Youdell 2006: 35)

This conceptualisation also opens up new understandings of knowledge and its relationship with power as Foucault shows ‘that power and knowledge are not external to one another.’ (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 114) For this thesis such a conception of knowledge-power implies that the students are produced as genderclasted subjects within certain relations of power and are *known* in the classroom in specific ways. Knowledge of them as specific kinds of students (“good”/“bad”, their grades, perceptions of their motivation and ability) is both circulated as a result of the teacher-pupil relationship, and enables (and limits) teaching-learning practices and relationships. As I show in chapter six, students are known, and learn to know, as certain kinds of subjects of the (welfare) state as well; that is, the state demands and generates certain knowledge (grades, benefits, family circumstance) about them for purposes of welfare.

Further, both sets of relationships – teacher-pupil and citizen-state – are, in turn, inscribed by genderclaste relations in wider society. I show that such knowledge is central to the exercise of power in – and through – the classroom and enables what Foucault terms ‘the “government of individualization.”’ This power-knowledge and the associated government of individualization are what everyday practices of resistance (seek to) challenge (Foucault 1982: 781). He further argues that it is this government of individualization against which everyday struggles are most immediately levelled. These immediate practices of resistance and accommodation are one of the aspects of classroom processes that I investigate in this thesis.

2.5.1 Foucault: disciplinary techniques

In this section I discuss the ‘tools’ Foucault develops for studying power, that is, the disciplinary techniques and ‘the technologies of the self’ (Atkins 2008) which are ‘the means of bringing power relations into being’ (Foucault 1982: 792) and that together produce students (as well as the teachers and the ethnographer) as ‘meaningful subjects and docile objects.’ (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: xxiii) According to Foucault,

‘Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them

a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations.’ (Foucault 1991: 147)

Disciplinary or objectifying practices are practices that seek to individualise, order and categorise individuals in a given institutional context (Foucault 1982). I show that through this ordering and categorisation (objectification) students are sought to be (re)produced as particular kinds of genderclasted and *docile* objects within classroom discourses. To understand his discussion of disciplinary power and mechanisms the notion of what Foucault calls ‘bio-power’ is vital (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 7). Bio-technico power is a political technology that emerged in the industrial west in the seventeenth century and represented ‘a new technical and political rationality’ (ibid: 133-34) for better management and welfare of human societies in order to increase productivity and strength (of the state) (ibid: 7-8). Thus, Foucault (1991: 149) posits that

‘...disciplinary tactics is situated on the axis that links the singular and the multiple, it allows both the characterization of the individual as individual and the ordering of a given multiplicity.’

That is, disciplinary practices or ‘tactics’ (Foucault 1991: 149) are the means to situate and circulate individual students not only within the institution of school but also the larger social ‘system of differentiations’ (Foucault 1982: 792), for example, Brahmanical patriarchy. In this thesis, I grapple with classroom texts and practices in order to ‘situate (them) not only in the inextricability of functioning, but in the coherence of a tacti[c]’ (Foucault 1991: 139); that is, in both, the immediate context of the classroom as well as the logics of Brahmanical patriarchy, capitalism and neoliberalism. Examples of such objectifying practices can be found in my analyses of teaching-learning relationships and practices in chapter five and that of various aspects of the moral curriculum in chapter six.

2.5.2 Foucault: technologies of the self

At the same time Foucault’s conceptualization of technologies of the self allows one to appreciate the way human beings work upon themselves; how they monitor, regulate and model themselves, that is, how they strategically appropriate and reject

certain identities (roles, places, statuses and attributes) in a given context in their efforts to survive despite odds. Rabinow and Rose (1994) note that according to Foucault, 'these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group.' This 'politically active subject' (ibid: 33) reflects Foucault's view of power relations as 'mobile, reversible, and unstable' (ibid: 34). Being politically active, thus, implies that a person appropriates techniques or practices for the purpose of self-formation.

Such a subject does not exist outside of power relations: irrespective of how much or how little power she may be able to exercise in a given setting, these power relations define 'the condition of [the subject's] possibility' (Butler 1991: 14 cited in Davies 2006: 428-429). As I show in chapters five and six students take up identities in and through the exercise of power in order to both accommodate and resist teachers' exercise of power. These instances of 'constitution' of subjects are what we are able to engage through Foucault's conceptualisation of subjectification rather than seeing them as subjects 'determined' by structures of Brahmanical patriarchy or capitalism or state-funded formal education (Youdell 2006).

Thus, though Foucault does not offer a normative theory of power (Atkins 2008), or a prescription for change (Rose and Rabinow 1982) he shows that it is possible and desirable to develop a critique of disciplinary power because of the ways in which it 'narrows possibilities for human living, [...] and by coercing individuals to conform to a limited range of experiences.' (Atkins 2008: 207). Secondly, it is possible to use his conceptualisation of subjectification and disciplinary power to gain insights into the ways in which power is exercised in a particular institutional and sociocultural context in order to imagine interventions into the 'destructive' aspect of power (Atkins 2008: 207). As I show in the next section, I supplement Foucault's work with Rancière's notion of political subjectivation to interrogate and reimagine classroom texts and practices in this thesis.

2.5.3 Rancière: political subjectivation

In a previous section I discussed Rancière's thesis of equality which is closely linked to another central argument made by Rancière regarding the very meaning of "politics". There is a fundamental association between Rancière's thesis of equality, his critique of the explicative order and his notion of *politics*. He argues that not only are all human being intellectually equal but it is in the assertion or 'verification' of this equality that emancipation happens; and this verification entails nothing less than *politics* itself. For Rancière, politics is precisely the confrontation between equality and the *police* logic. *Police* logic or *policy* is a particular distribution of roles and places and thus the logic of ordering and governing of society. It relies on 'community consent' or consensus (Rancière 1992: 58). On the other hand, politics is the enactment of a challenge to an existing distribution of roles and places. It is the moment when the police logic and the egalitarian logic 'encounter' each other (Rancière 1992: 58; Bingham and Biesta 2010: 38).

This assertion is not an articulation of conflict or difference; it is an instance of acting/speaking 'as if' one is equal to those she is addressing (Simons and Masschelein 2010). As I demonstrate in chapters five and six, the significance of such a conceptualisation of equality and politics cannot be overstated in the context of the education of informal working class students. Moreover, in view of the political concerns of this thesis it must also be noted that Rancière (1992: 58) does 'not assume a necessary link between the idea of emancipation and the narrative of a universal wrong and a universal victim.' An example of the universal victim could be the proletariat. Rancière (2011: 9) argues that the debates between postmodernists and modernists notwithstanding, "emancipation" has *always* been about local and micro narratives rather universal or grand narratives.

Politics, here is the redistribution of the sensible (Rancière 2010). By 'sensible' Rancière means that which is visible and/or sayable; a police logic is a particular distribution of the sensible is which determines not only the roles and places of everyone but who appears at all and who does not, what is sayable/visible and what is not. A challenge to this order is a challenge to existing distribution of the sensible and constitutes: *dissensus*, the opposite of consensus. Within this conceptualisation

subjectification or subjectivization is an experience, not of identification, but *dis*-identification (Rancière 1992: 61, emphasis mine), or an 'impossible identification' (ibid: 62). Rancière argues that a political subject is someone who does not have a role or place in the police order, that is, in the existing distribution of the sensible.

Thus political subjectivation entails the constitution of 'a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places, and functions of society' (Rancière 2004a, p. 51 quoted in Bingham and Biesta 2010, p. 38).' Supernumerary because it is not simply the 'identity' of a woman, worker or Dalit, that is, any existing (marginalised) group; it is the woman, worker or Dalit who is refusing to play the role assigned to them and who thus disrupts the distribution of the sensible; so it could be anyone (with any identity/ies) and it is no one particular group. Such a subject is 'an *in-between*...between statuses, and identities', that is, she is acting out 'the interval between identities' (Rancière 1992: 62) Rancière argues that this interval is also the place of working out difference (for example, of age, caste or gender):

'difference does not mean the assumption of a different identity or the plain confrontation of two identities. The place for the working of difference is not the 'self' or the culture of a group. It is the *topos* of an argument. And the place for such an argument is an interval.' (ibid: 62).

Rancière also points out that moments or acts of "pure" politics or subjectivization are rare but it is present in 'a lot of 'confused' matters and conflicts' i.e. taking place in the space ordered by the police logic, but, challenging it (Rancière 2011: 5).

Lastly, in this thesis I use Simons and Masschelein's (2010) terminology to distinguish between Rancièrian and Foucauldian notions of subjectification. Foucauldian subjectivity which refers to the ways in which individuals are 'tied' to their identities and turn themselves into subjects by appropriating identities available in discourses of which they are part, is termed 'governmental subjectification'. Within a Rancièrian framework, such an instance of subjectification is 'identification'; and Rancière argues that Foucault's concerns lie in the space 'that I call police' (Rancière 2010: 93). It is at the limits of this police logic, when a person steps between identity-boxes (for example, good and bad student) and disrupts existing distribution of roles and places that a dis-identification takes place and it is this, that Rancière calls

subjectivation and Simons and Masschelein helpfully term 'political subjectivation' distinguishing it from Foucault's conceptualisation of governmental subjectivation.

2.6 Official knowledge, curricular form and (re)production

The 'relatively uncontentious' (Young 1998: 1) understanding of curricular texts as political (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991, Young 1971, Kumar 1989) demands that school texts be interrogated in order to unpack the particular power relations they seek to legitimate. In the Indian context this is particularly important given the centrality of textbooks (Kumar 1988) across school categories. This is not a novel idea¹⁶ but in India the exercise continues to be important because of the impact of regime change at the centre, on textbooks in the past (Bhog 2002, NCERT 2006) as well as more recently. In this thesis curricular representations of particular social groups is only one of things I am interested in. This is so, partly, because this is an area of education that has received much greater attention than any others in India. There are two reasons for my engagement with curricular representations in terms of the kind of genderclaste relations they portray: one, in order to offer a more complete picture of classroom processes in which textbooks play an important role. Two, I adopt the less common approach of scrutinising lesson transactions in terms of their silencing or objectification of particular social groups. This approach though recognised as more useful (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991) has rarely been adopted (Nawani 2013) with Kumar (1989) and Manjrekar (2007) being exceptions.

In addition, about three-fourths of chapter seven focuses on 'curricular form' including assessment practices as these have remained largely untouched in India beyond numerous but brief references to the practices of rote, memorisation and textbook-based examinations. My purpose in focusing on curricular form is to offer a theorisation of (re)production of class relations using Michael Apple's work. Such scrutiny is now urgently needed thanks to neoliberal reforms and specifically, the

¹⁶ Indeed, it is old enough to have lost significance among sociology of education scholars in some places like Britain as Young (1998) laments.

‘extra-national’ and inter/national focus on “quality” (Sarangapani 2010) in “third world” educational contexts. A rare example of such scrutiny of pedagogic reforms with reference to the specific local policy context can be found in Sriprakash’s (2012) work discussed earlier. In this section I explain the combination of theoretical frameworks I use in my analysis of curriculum as well as discussing some of the existing critiques of genderclaste representations in Indian textbooks.

While there are a large number of textbook analyses in India these do not follow any one framework (Nawani 2013) nor do all studies spell out the overall framework or method. In her review of the development of ‘criteria for textbook analysis’ Nawani identifies three kinds of approaches which attend to: 1) the text alone, 2) the text and the ‘socio-psychological world of the reader’ and 3) the text and ‘the learning context’ (ibid: 167). Of these, mine corresponds to the second approach listed here thus following in the footsteps of scholars who have grappled with questions of ‘representativeness (accuracy, adequacy and form)’ of various sociocultural groups and based on gender. To that end, I opt for content analysis which, in existing literature, ranges from ‘a perfunctory checklist’ to ‘a more in-depth investigation’ (ibid: 161)¹⁷. I engage one specific aspect of this type of analysis keeping in mind the central concerns of this thesis: ‘socio-cultural co-relates and text-pedagogic and sociological implications,’ (Nawani 2013: 167). As Nawani points out this aspect helps interrogate texts for the way they ‘reproduce existing inequalities’ and among others, have been influenced by the work of Michael Apple and Michael F D Young (ibid: 172). Among Indian scholars, I review and draw upon the work of Kumar (1989), Bhog (2002), Manjrekar (2007, 2011), Advani (1996), Scrase (1993) and Talib (2003). These works offer insightful analyses of how gender and class relations are represented in distorted ways and conflicts based on gender and class obscured.

¹⁷ More specifically, I use the scale used by Grant and Sleeter (1991) which is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

2.6.1 Texts and transactions in the classroom

Manjrekar studies how the discussion around a lesson on future occupations in a primary classroom populated by urban working class children invokes the nation and specific class and gender relations in order to 'capture the process of socialisation of children into the ideal of labour in the modern nation[n]' (Manjrekar 2007: 2). For example, she shows that the teacher systematically delegitimises informal sector occupations like that of carpentry while encouraging the more middle class professions like those of medicine or engineering. The pictures in the textbook also exclusively represented 'the urban middle-class, except the farmer[r]', and teacher and lesson text sought to construct all labour as 'linked to the idea of 'national progress'.' (ibid: 7)

Manjrekar notes that the teacher engaged both boys and girls in discussion of what was needed to realise their dreams: while 'hard work' was repeatedly and strongly recommended for all students, there was a difference in the amount of time spent engaging girls and boys (boys addressed for longer than girls) and the values that she catalogues as being necessary for success. Secondly, her view of girls' education and work force participation was instrumental (contributing to family income) and reinforced dominant meanings of "femininity" and "masculinity" by linking different occupations with specific attributes and thus with girls and boys respectively. For examples, girls were to be modest, compassionate and caring so they could be good nurses and teachers and improve general knowledge and public speaking while boys were told to be regular, 'build up strength, learn to face troubles' and not 'cry for small things...'. (ibid: 9) Thus girls were seen only as 'moral agent[ts] in the nation's progress' unlike boys who could directly participate in industrialisation, or, higher professional education (ibid: 7).

These findings reflect Bhog's findings in her paper which reviews textbooks in the policy context created by the National Policy of Education 1986 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2000 (Bhog 2002). The former paid short shrift to questions of women's emancipation while the latter reflected dominant views of the right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party which was in power at the centre. Bhog highlights the 'burden of tradition' that the National Curriculum Framework 2000 reinforced

and which served to silence any challenges to the patriarchal family (ibid: 1639). Her review of NCERT language textbooks finds similar binaries of masculine/feminine as Manjrekar (2007). Men are the protectors, the knowers and the providers whereas the women depend on them for information, 'security' and their only job is to offer 'love and affection' to their families (Bhog 2002: 1642). However, unlike Manjrekar (2007), who pointed out the caste-based distribution/access to working class jobs, Bhog (2002) does not attend to class or caste.

Manjrekar (2011) focusing on the gendered aspects of childhood also reviewed the textbooks used in a *Vidya Bharati* school, run by the RSS. She locates the textbook in the overall discourse of Hindutva and 'discusses the historical and ideological contours of the knowledge proposed in this text and the pedagogical demands of its transaction.' (2011: 350) She shows that lesson texts are 'intended' for a specific kind of Hindu girl child. While in this thesis religious nationalism is not a major concern, it is important to note that the cultural politics of Hindutva has specific and direct implications for Hindu girls; it reshapes and reinforces girls' role as 'gatekeepers' that not only ensure purity of caste and class but also fight the 'cultural pollution' (Manjrekar 2011: 357) represented by interfaith and intercaste marriages in a "Hindu" India. Manjrekar (ibid: 363) insightfully notes that since such ideal (upper caste) Hindu girls are 'a construct of Hindu nationalis[m]' rather than real girls, it is important to analyse textbook content in the context of 'historical shifts and social transitions' that characterise girls' lives in order to 'reveal the significance of these tensions and the complex mediations between the realities of girls' lives and their agency as women.' Through the examples that I analyse in chapter seven I try to unpack precisely these 'complex mediations' between IWC girls' lives, textbook content and the girls' agency.

In addition, I focus on the curricular silences around caste-based discrimination and conflict and the way these silences are then filled by teacher talk that further obscures and distorts historical and contemporary realities of casteism. A limitation of my analysis of curriculum is that it does not offer data specifically on the way children make sense of such lesson content and teacher talk. But through a discussion of children's socioeconomic circumstances and instances of subjectification elsewhere in the thesis, I offer a window on the distance between

curricular texts and realities of marginalisation and resistance. While there are analyses of representations of social class difference and relations in textbooks (Scrase 1993, Talib 2003, Advani 1996) there are hardly any other instances of a critical analysis of lesson transaction that focuses on a category other than that of gender. The only exception is Kumar's analysis of a History lesson discussing *Tantricism* in a higher secondary classroom (1989). Focusing on the experience of an Adivasi (ST) boy at the back of the classroom Kumar problematises curricular texts and pedagogic practices that combined to (re)produce both the dominant notion of "backwardness" and Adivasi communities as "backward".

Kumar describes the pedagogic (including disciplinary) strategies used in the classroom which entailed 'lecturing' by the teacher (ibid: 5), the ritual of students being asked for, and providing, 'right answers' (Sarangapani 2003) and the teacher punishing students who could not answer her questions. These practices limited student participation to reproduction of facts and disallowed any challenges to textbook "knowledge" or alternate worldviews. Sarangapani (2003) also points to the fact that teachers tightly regulate the entry of 'out-of-school' knowledge particularly through students. Kumar argues that since dominant groups' 'meaning and viewpoint are reflected in the curriculu[m]' (Kumar 1989: 62) the ST boy was forced to either learn to see his own community as "backward" in order to be a "successful" student, or, in his refusal to view his community as such, learn to be a "failure" (a "backward" student) in the classroom. Either way, the ST boy was being forced to 'learn to be backward'. Nearly thirty years later, when increasing numbers of students from historically marginalised communities are accessing formal education (Nambissan 2004, Ramachandran 2004), my thesis shows, that these pedagogies and curricula have still not moved closer to sociocultural and epistemic justice. Instead, neoliberal reforms steadily seek to lower curricular standards while shutting down discussions on the content and character of education (Sarangapani 2010).

2.6.2 The sociology of knowledge: Michael F D Young

In order to emphasise the abovementioned point, in chapter seven, I focus on the experience of an OBC (*Ahir*) girl in the classroom and use Michael Young's framework for a critical engagement with it. Young's sociology of knowledge not only problematises 'how knowledge is selected, organized and assessed in educational institutions' (p. 19) but also sought to establish that 'sociology of education is no longer conceived as an area of enquiry distinct from the sociology of knowledge.' (p. 3) Thus he also forces our attention on the link between what is studied or taught and the 'institutional context' of this teaching-learning activity (p. 7). Young argues that since schools legitimate certain knowledge when it is considered worthy of inclusion in formal educational activity, it becomes the duty of the sociologist to scrutinise whose knowledge – and thus cultural perspective, worldviews – it is that is being thus validated. Two of the questions that then must be asked of school curriculum relate to 'prestige' and 'ownership' (p. 32). That is, what differential value is attached to different kinds of knowledge: for example, is the knowledge of caring for livestock more or less valuable than that of the formal definitions of statistical concepts like 'mean' or 'median'? And an equally significant question is: which group(s) have greater or lesser access to each kind of knowledge?

The other aspect of Young's discussion of the sociology of knowledge is its attention to the difference between school knowledge and everyday knowledge. With reference to Goody and Watt (1962) Young explains that the focus on literate skills in industrial societies and the shift 'from 'learning' to 'teaching'' (with imperialism this emphasis would spread to former colonies) experience has become increasingly irrelevant to formal school curriculum. Instead, the latter favour 'abstraction' and what is seen as 'high-status knowledge' (Young 1971: 38). Young lists other characteristics of this knowledge as: 'individualism', 'abstractness of the knowledge and its structuring and compartmentalizing independently of the knowledge of the learne[r]', and the distance of school knowledge from everyday experience.

2.6.3 Curricular form: Michael Apple

Apple similarly problematises 'official knowledge' (Apple 2014, 2013, 1991) and further argues that it is 'the level of social practice' that must be our focus of our attention as that is where 'ideological and material influences' are manifested (2013: 94). To that end he proposes the notion of 'curricular form' that is, how curricular material is packaged and what kinds of 'controls' are entailed in this form. With reference to corporates' 'purchase of labor power' and the former's control over 'how it is to be used' Apple distinguishes three kinds of controls that he argues are used to minimise 'interference or participation by workers in the conception and planning of the wor[k]': simple, technical and bureaucratic (ibid: 95). While Apple discusses this 'logic of control' (ibid: 96) to analyse the deskilling and reskilling of teachers in the American public funded system I find this theoretical framework useful for analysing students' experience of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and it is to analyse classroom processes from students' perspective that I deploy Apple's conceptualisation of curricular form and various controls.

Apple (ibid: 96) explains that 'simple controls' entail giving and following of instructions regarding a task whereas technical controls are 'embedded in the physical structure of [a] job.' According to him, bureaucratic control usually work in tandem with simple controls. In my research I found that questions papers and timetables both worked as technical controls. On the face of it a time table may seem like a combination of simple and bureaucratic controls but as I show it also achieves control over teachers' and students' work. Secondly the timetable is set in a way that does not allow teachers to do anything more/less/different from specified tasks. While orders to conduct tests at specific times or in specific ways symbolise bureaucratic controls they also act as technical controls as a result of the elaborate time tables sent from state level authorities that detailed what is to be learnt and when.

Apple argues that 'prepackaged' (ibid: 97), 'standardized' curricular material best represents technical controls in contemporary USA as it 'prespecifies' teachers' and students' responses and actions (ibid: 98). This criticism of form is relevant to the Indian context not only because of the curricular material used to teach but also

because of the way assessment processes have been specified and narrowed down and teachers' control over procedures further reduced. After all, a textbook centric approach traditionally prespecified students' responses for as long as the formal school system has existed in India. In India, though government contracts for printing and publishing textbooks for government schools are lucrative assignments, the problem on which I wish to focus relates to the stratification of education rather than the economic implications of standardised curricular material and tests: I argue that curricular form (specifically, nature of exercises, possible responses, nature and purpose of assessment) especially limits possible pedagogic activity and learning for students in this category of school. The approach seems to be to stick to the *minimum*. Thus a very limited number of facts are on offer, in tests these need to be reproduced, and there is neither possibility nor resources for any other sort of teaching learning activity.

2.7 Conclusion

I began this chapter with feminist critiques of caste and gender structures, namely Brahmanical patriarchy and the relationship between class, caste and gender which are central to the analytical framework I use in this thesis. I also looked at the notion and emergence of the informal working class to which almost all children's families belonged. These perspectives allow us to see that an intersectional approach is needed to make sense of poor, non-Brahman, IWC children's experiences; gendercaste intersections have a particular significance in view of the history of India's educational inequalities and that of caste (and gender) based exclusion from access to knowledge and formal education (see chapter one for general discussion) on the one hand and patriarchal control over women's movement and re/productive labour on the other.

In a gendercaste analysis of education the normative notion of childhood becomes glaringly apparent. In this chapter I offered a brief review of the literature critiquing this normative notion which informs contemporary policy discourses around child labour and education. This critique, and an alternate research agenda suggested by

critics, forms the framework for my discussion of lived realities of childhood in chapter four. My engagement with these realities is also informed by a discussion of the genderclaste relations that inscribe these gendered and caste IWC childhoods.

I then move on to a discussion of scholarship on classroom processes, beginning with pedagogic processes and relations. Through a review of the literature I make a case for using the 'deficit model' to theorise class-caste relationships that shape pedagogic practices in the classroom. An understanding of social distance between students and teachers and the resulting view of IWC students as incapable and unmotivated is supplemented with a Rancièrian conceptualisation of intellectual equality. In chapter 5 I utilise this complex framework to engage with caste relationships in the classroom as well as students' contestation of caste-based educational categories and hierarchies ("good" and "bad" students).

Related to teachers' view of IWC students as intellectually incapable is a moral evaluation of impoverished communities. In order to explore what I term the 'moral curriculum' of the classroom I researched, I offered a review of scholarship engaging with discipline and moral policing in Indian classrooms. This literature shows how students are constructed as belonging to particular social and gender groups in classrooms. However, given the inadequacy of literature on how students become genderclasted subjects that is, focussing on intersectional power, I add to this literature using my discussion of Brahmanical patriarchy and Foucauldian and Rancièrian engagements with the notion of subjectivity.

Foucauldian understanding of objectifying and subjectifying practices allow me to systematise the way disciplinary power works in the classrooms as well as the way children work on themselves to become certain kinds of genderclasted subjects. On the other hand, Rancière offers an understanding of subjectivation as a process that challenges the relationship between social locations and identities, that is, challenges identity categories by stepping between them. This understanding opens up new possible readings of students' subjectivating practices which resist existing genderclaste relations. I combine Rancièrian and Foucauldian understandings of subjectivity to understand how students survive, negotiate and disrupt classroom discourses.

The last aspect of classrooms that I study is curriculum. Existing scholarship on curriculum studies in India focuses on representations of marginalised groups like but does not systematically theorise class-caste based reproduction through curriculum. To address this gap I use Young's and Apple's work on the sociology of knowledge which I have outlined in this chapter. I also explain Apple's conceptualisation of curricular form and control which help me interrogate pedagogic and assessment practices in the classroom especially with reference to neoliberal reforms in Indian education (chapter seven).

Thus the literature and theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter offer an overall framework to engage with (re)production of genderclaste relations in the classroom through interrogation of multiple aspects of classroom processes, namely, curriculum, pedagogy and moral curriculum.

Chapter 3

Methodological considerations: ‘excavating’ and producing inscriptions of (in)equality

In this thesis I engage with classroom texts and processes in order to understand the relationship between micro processes in the classroom with macro relations (gender, class and caste) in the society, which, in turn, help theorise processes and phenomena of (re)production of gendercaste relations in and through education. In the previous chapter I detailed my theoretical framework which attempts to hold together materialist and deconstructionist accounts; that is, attends to structural inequalities as well as production of subjectivities. I now turn to a consideration of methodology, methods, the understandings of subjectivity/subject and ethical and practical concerns I faced in the field.

In this chapter I discuss feminist and ethnographic research, in terms of their investments, politics and theoretical underpinnings. I begin with a consideration of the relationship between method, methodology and epistemology, following Sandra Harding (1987) and explain why I chose an ethnographic approach and what makes my work feminist. I also problematize the racist origins of ethnography and drawing upon feminist scholarship (Skeggs 1998, Visweswaran 1994) discuss ways of moving beyond this problematic past and reimagining both feminism and ethnography.

In the next section I describe the school and participants as well as issues of consent in view of students’ minor¹⁸ status and their socioeconomic background. I use Riessman’s (2005) concept of ‘situated ethics’ to address these issues. I move on to the actual nitty-gritty of collecting data: the methods I used, the limitations and constraints and some of the decision-making processes involved in giving the thesis its current form. I also discuss in detail the way interviews were conceptualised, owned and managed in the field; and the way class differences shaped data

¹⁸ Legally, a ‘minor’ is anyone who is under eighteen years of age in India.

collection. The last part of this section discusses some aspects of the way I learnt to see 'differently' as part of the process of analysis.

The final section of the chapter deals with questions of ethics and reflexivity which I theorise using feminist reflections on fieldwork experiences (Visweswaran 1994). I present both materialist and deconstructionist accounts of reflecting on ethical issues and the power relationships between the researcher and the researched.

3.1 Why ethnography, why feminism (which feminism)

3.1.1 Considerations of methodology, method and epistemology¹⁹

I begin with Harding's distinction between method, methodology and epistemology (Harding 1987: 2-3): while method is the specific 'techniqu[es] for gathering evidenc[e]', methodology 'is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed;' lastly, epistemology 'is a theory of knowledge.' In this chapter, I discuss aspects of all three in order to trace the processes and politics involved in producing the ethnographic knowledge that constitutes this thesis. Thus what is at stake in a discussion of methods is: how this thesis conceptualises knowledge and how knowledge is produced through the theoretical framework detailed in the previous chapter.

As Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2006) point out:

'We are living at a time of rapid global socio-economic and cultural changes in a period of late capitalism (Harvey, 1989; Giddens, 1990; Jamieson, 1991). These changes, such as de-industrialisation, feminisation of local labour markets and the diversification of family forms, are contesting and fragmenting traditional lifestyles. Alongside this, education [...] is being destabilised by this emerging socio-economic uncertainty.'

Though the authors are discussing western contexts like Britain and the kind of uncertainty they refer to is vastly different in its nature and manifestations from that

¹⁹ See Harding 1987.

characterising “third world” contexts such as India the fact of uncertainty and change remains the same (despite different political and cultural trajectories). My attention to material conditions is not an effort to identify ‘fixed bases of social power’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2006: 50). Rather, it is an effort to theorise the material conditions that place limits on production and disruption of identities (identification and dis-identification²⁰). I simultaneously attend to shifts in these material conditions as well as the possibilities for disrupting and challenging oppressive power relations in and beyond the classroom; this is evident in my analysis of contemporary urban childhoods and shifting caste relations in chapter four. My view of power privileges the intertwining of material and discursive dimensions of social relations by attending to everyday practices of negotiation and contestation. As much as I focus on historically specific – and shifting – bases of power such as genderclaste, my interest also lies in Rancièrian dis-identifications and the politics/dissensus thus enabled.

This means that despite my focus on material conditions I do not work with an *a priori* subject; a deconstructionist focus on ‘a range of subject positions that cannot be contained within a singular category[y]’ (Youdell 2000), allow me to better understand the interplay of historically specific genderclaste power relations in contemporary urban India; that is, im/possibilities of being in and beyond the classroom and the historically specific material conditions framing these im/possibilities.

A Foucauldian understanding does not mean that poverty, hunger, concerns around safety of women/girls, exploitative labour markets or disenfranchising neoliberal policy frameworks do not exist. Rather, it implies that individuals are not completely *determined* by these realities; that they struggle and negotiate in order to survive in, challenge and change the world around them. Moreover, a Rancièrian take on power relations makes an even more significant contribution regarding intellectual equality and the superfluity of ‘the explicative order’ of formal education and indeed,

²⁰ The term ‘dis-identification’ throughout this thesis refers to my discussion of Rancièr’s conceptualisation of political subjectivation in the previous chapter. (Skeggs (1997) also mentions the term but in an entirely different sense.)

of a 'society pedagogized' (Bingham and Biesta 2010). While acts of dissensus directly challenge such a police logic in various ways a view of education, society and individual intellectual capacity that enables us to recognise the significance of this dissensus offers renewed frameworks of reimagining education.

Thus this thesis is also underpinned by a Foucauldian understanding of knowledge as outlined in the previous chapter. I view knowledge production as inseparable from the power relations which enable various processes and methods of knowledge production on the ground (in the field and academia). Simultaneously, efforts to produce knowledge reshape power relations. Thus, such a theory of knowledge, in practice, cannot be reconciled with a view of the subject as centred or 'sovereign' (Youdell 2000: 108), that is, determined by fixed power structures; instead as Youdell (ibid: 106) notes, 'what we *are*' shapes, but cannot be seen as absolutely determining, 'what/how we will/can *know*.'

3.1.2 Why ethnography

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson offer useful functional definitions of ethnography that inform my work:

'The term 'ethnography' refers to a research style, and to the written product of that research activity.' (Atkinson 1990: 3)

'involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 3)

Since the research question concerned classroom texts and processes spending longer period of time in the classroom offers a richer view of exactly what happens as a result of – and to influence – students' socioeconomic conditions and locations. Observing classrooms also allows the researcher to understand everyday practices that shape (and challenge) worldviews and values in the classroom discourse. Since my purpose was also to understand genderclaste relations in a particular cultural and

political context, sustained conversations and classroom observation also allowed me to understand the layered context at the levels of the classroom, institution and city. The unstructured and open-ended nature of interviews allowed this understanding to develop over a period of time. In the thesis I do not (always) distinguish between interviews and conversations; while there were systematic interviews, and as I discuss shortly, the term, 'interview' was significant, there were also unplanned conversations every day that added detail to interviews and observations.

This prolonged interaction, nuance (insight into complexity of power relations) and depth that a classroom ethnography offers is not available with other qualitative methods. During ethnographic fieldwork it was possible to interview iteratively which allowed me to delve into themes that were not initially part of my research question: the dimension of religious nationalism, boys' political participation and informal labour. These aspects emerged over a period of time as significant to children's participation in, and negotiation of, institutional practices and social relations at school. It was the time and opportunity afforded by ethnographic fieldwork that allowed me to grasp these dimensions and to make decisions regarding inclusion and exclusion of various aspects of children's lives in and beyond the school. In a study that was intended to move into uncharted territory at multiple levels (*inter alia*, theorising caste relations, pedagogic processes and resistance) in Indian sociology of education, it was important to ensure that I could not only spend "sufficient" (a qualitative decision to be made in the field) time in the classroom but also engage systematically with complexities of everyday classroom texts and practices.

Thus, at every level, research questions and theoretical framework guided methodological choices. As the previous chapter argues a Foucauldian framework necessitates focus on everyday practices rather than larger historical structures; similarly, Rancière's (2011) observation that narratives of resistance and change are often played out at micro levels in a contingent manner, directed my attention to the nuances of the context – micro-processes and everyday attempts at 'breaking and entering' into the police logic (Bingham and Biesta 2010). My analysis of gendercaste relations, shifts in larger relations of economic production as well as

education policy and instances of resistance in this thesis are evidence that ethnographic attention to classroom processes and the play of social relations bears fruit when one is concerned with (re)production of power relations in an institutional context.

3.1.3 Problematizing ethnography

There is no one definition of feminist research method/ology in general (Harding 1987), nor a single understanding of feminist ethnography in particular (Visweswaran 1994, Youdell 2000). However, I underscore the specific features that are central to theory and practice in this thesis and thus try and pin down what I mean by feminism. My starting point is some of the feminist critiques of the origins of ethnography in a racialised Anthropology (Skeggs 1998, Visweswaran 1994). Arguably, ethnography was developed as a method of producing knowledge about the anthropologist's racial/ethnic/cultural "others" and given my own institutional location in a "first world" university as well as a concern with the Foucauldian problematic of *savoir/pouvoir*, it is important that I stay alert to the burden of racism ethnographic approaches carry.

At the same time Skeggs (1998) and Visweswaran (1994), through discussions of shifting styles and emphases in ethnographic writing, also offer ways of moving forward. Skeggs (1998) points out that ethnography is useful in that it 'provides the space for exploring how theories and concepts can work to understand how we are located and move through social space' and its 'attention to temporality' (ibid: 41) allows us to 'understand habituation, reiteration, reproduction, becoming and belonging' (ibid: 42). Secondly, Skeggs (ibid: 35) notes that ethnography 'has also been used to excavate those made invisible, silenced and considered not worthy of being known.'

Kamala Visweswaran (1994) more specifically takes up the various feminist questions in ethnography. In a comparative critique of various genres of ethnographic writing – "classic" ethnography, experimental ethnography,

“confessional” (or first-person or “popularised”) ethnography²¹ – she develops insights into how a more self-aware and accountable feminist ethnography can be practiced; particularly, in a way that also simultaneously pays attention to questions of sexism, racism, and colonialism. She favours ‘replacing (the) goal of total understanding and representation’ with ‘skepticism and respect of integrity of difference’ thus ‘[problematizing] pursuit of the “other” as experimental ethnography (ibid: 21-22). I draw upon Visweswaran and others in the last section of this chapter where I discuss issues of ethics and reflexivity. Thus, attention to power relations between the researcher and the researched are fundamental to a feminist methodology. Further, in view of the way this thesis incorporates aspects of both materialist and deconstructionist epistemologies my understanding of such power relations seeks to invoke a decentred subject rather than an “authentic” or ‘essential’ one (ibid: 106).

Secondly, a Rancièrian framework allows me to offer an account of ‘political agency’ (Pelletier 2009: 13). As Pelletier (ibid: 8) argues, this framework enables ethnographers to read data in a way that ‘offe[rs] knowledge of equality’ as opposed to that of domination; that is, ‘reading/producing words against the guarantees, or modes of legitimation, offered by the social location of the speaker.’ I show in this thesis that such a reading/production of worlds enables a view of the world that appreciates intellectual equality and thus disrupts hierarchies of knowledge and police logics of disciplinary practice. Within this framework methodology is about an ‘aesthetic, because a research based account dramatizes the world in a particular way.’ (Pelletier 2009: 8) It stages a particular distribution of the sensible; in reading accounts of political subjectivation I seek to ‘reconfigu[re] the field of knowledge to undo the partitions which divide people into territories of competence, or the territories by which people are assigned social (unequal) attributes.’ (ibid: 9) This possibility of equality is opposed to the division of theory and practice as the work, respectively, of superior and inferior intelligences (ibid; Rancière 1991).

²¹ Her point is that though confessional narratives are not accepted as ethnographies, these should be.

Comparing Rancière's work in *The Nights of Labour: archives of the proletarian dream* to Butler's on drag, Pelletier argues that 'it is about making prominent in one's analytic strategy discursive practices which *make the contingency of inequality sensible*.' In my analysis of classroom texts and practices this is precisely what I seek to do by moving away from a Foucauldian framework to disrupt the correlations between 'ways of being' and 'the division of labour.' (Pelletier 2009: 9, emphasis mine) Such a disruption allows students, workers, women (or anyone else) to step between identities by being and doing 'something other than their social identity.'

3.2 Fieldwork: site, participants, consent

Since I was interested in students' views and critiques as well as their experiences of genderclaste I selected middle school students (between age groups of ten or eleven and fifteen or sixteen years) as more suitable. It is also the age when students, particularly girls, begin to experience greater restrictions, and responsibilities in/beyond home (for example begin supplementing family income or support in domestic work). Class VIII is the last year of schooling guaranteed by the Indian state under the Right to Education Act, 2009. I felt that it will be an opportunity to discuss their overall experience of school education with students as well as developing insights into what they (are expected to) leave school with.

The school where research was conducted was a coeducational, Hindi-medium, state government-run Middle school, that is, it comprised std. VI, VII and VIII. It shared premises with a Primary School (std. I-V) and a High School (std. IX-X), had three classroom one for std. VI, VII and VIII each and approximately²² two hundred and fifty students. In the physical sense, the Middle school comprised four rooms – one for each classroom (VI, VII, VIII) and a staff room shared by teachers and the Head Master – and toilets (separate for girls and boys) and a playground which it shared with the other two schools.

²² 'Approximate' because throughout the year some students left the school while others were admitted.

The school was headed by the Head Master, Manish Tiwari, and the rest of the staff consisted of five regular full-time Upper Divisional Teachers (UDTs) who taught Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Social Studies and Science; all of the staff were in their late forties or early fifties. There was a Guest Teacher employed at the rate of a hundred and fifty rupees per day to teach Mathematics since no regular, full-time teacher was available to teach the subject. There were seventy-nine students. The following table (Table 3.1) offers the caste-wise breakup of the student community in this classroom:

Table 3.1 Caste-composition of student community in Class VIII.

Caste category	Number of boys	Number of girls
Dalit/Scheduled Caste (SC) (formerly untouchable communities)	10	11
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	06	04
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	15; of these 2 pupils were Muslim	16; of these 3 pupils were Muslim
Upper caste (General category)	7	10; of these 2 pupils were Muslim
Total pupils: 79 (7 Of the pupils were from Muslim families)	38 (including 2 Muslim boys)	41 (including 5 Muslim girls)

While caste identities of students were obtained from the school records, teachers' castes were ascertained during conversations with them; in the Hindi-belt²³, last names also help identify a person's caste (though there are regional variations and the official categorisation can depend on the lists and definitions issued by state governments). For easy access I have tabulated information regarding teachers' responsibilities and social background in the following table (Table 3.2).

²³ See Glossary for explanation.

Table 3.2 Names, positions and caste background of staff members.

Staff member's name and position	Caste category	Subject taught
Mr. Manish Tiwari (Head Master, regular, full-time position)	Upper caste	Taught Mathematics whenever he could
Mrs. Prabha Shinde (Regular, full-time UDT)	Upper caste	Sanskrit; also Class Teacher for Class VIII
Mrs. Jyoti Gupta (Regular, full-time UDT)	Upper caste	English
Mrs. Usha Pandey (Regular, full-time UDT)	Upper caste	Science
Mr. Pramod Bhargav (Regular, full-time UDT)	Upper caste	Hindi
Mr. M L Vishwakarma (Regular, full-time UDT; also the Block Level Officer who had election-related responsibilities throughout the year)	Other Backward Class (OBC)	Social Science
Miss. Geeta Sisodiya (Guest Teacher employed at a daily wage of INR 150.00 ²⁴ per day)	General/Upper caste	Mathematics
Miss Preeti Mali (She had been the Guest Teacher till January 2015 when she quit and was replaced by Geeta Sisodiya)	OBC	Mathematics
Mrs. Ganga Bai (Casually appointed at INR 500.00 ²⁵ per month, <i>Bhojan Sahayika</i> (Midday Meal Helper))	SC	—

²⁴ At the time of field work this was roughly ₹1.50.

²⁵ Approximately ₹5.00 at the time of fieldwork.

3.2.1 Consent and 'situated ethics'

A lack of standard guidelines in India for social science research with minors makes consent a difficult issues to navigate. Ethical dilemma here cannot ultimately be resolved by taking recourse to legal definitions so I practiced – with immense sense of personal responsibility and much wariness – something akin to “ethics-in-context” (Reissman 2005). This issue captures all the dilemma of the researcher bound by universal abstract principles of ethics which become meaningless in specific cultural contexts. Since the children were under eighteen (minors) “privacy” and “consent” were important and difficult issues to address. Even if I explain that children have the right to refuse to participate or answer a question, neither parents nor children the idea, language, processes and spaces of academic research are an unfamiliar world for most people (in India). Then, as Reissman (ibid) asks, what could informed consent or a signed form mean? Often, parents and students seemed bored with my explanations for doing the research and even asked me impatiently to just get on with the questions.

Ultimately, the only solution lies in acknowledging that '[u]sing research materials ethically and responsibly involves ongoing negotiations – a perspective, again, that reaches beyond the narrow, one-shot agreement spelled out in the typical informed consent document.' (ibid: 475) As the British Sociological Association also advocates, I reiterated participants' rights at various stages, and if we seemed to be getting into themes and stories that could potentially upset them. I also informed them repeatedly – and ensured – that nothing they tell me will be passed on to teachers, parents, or the Head Master. Throughout the thesis, I use pseudonyms for all participants in order to preserve anonymity.

Even when children and parents agree, a major problem could arise with the need to sign consent forms which I chose to dispense with. Illiteracy and the already enormous burden of bureaucratic red tape necessitated that I did not add to the burden of parents who are often, and rightly, distrustful of paperwork as it represents state regulation and power. Reissman (ibid: 487) also notes that in post-colonial settings people's relationship with forms could be very peculiar; 'Committees have been guiding investigators with universal propositional ethics;

many of us in the field need alternatives – an ethics-in-context, grounded in the exigencies of settings. This is not the same as ethical opportunism, but a situated ethics needs to provide room for particularities that unfold during fieldwork.’

Reissman (ibid) raises another most pertinent concern: can people consent to participation when they do not know what an analysis of their choices and constraints would look like ultimately? Ultimately, I find that my primary source of resolutions to ethical concerns lies in the interconnectedness of ethics, methods and epistemology in feminist approaches (Harding 1987, Hill-Collins 1995).

3.3 Methods: data collection, decision making and analysis

3.3.1 Collecting, mapping and selecting texts and practices

Data collection during the ethnography entailed a range of techniques/methods: unstructured, open-ended interviews; more unplanned conversations; participant observation and analysis of textbooks as well as select policy documents and government orders received at the school. While the distinction between participant and non-participant observation is not always neat and tidy I qualify it as the former because my presence fundamentally altered classroom processes; at times, this would have been in ways that I was unable to grasp. Initially, most of my time was spent inside the classroom often even when conducting interviews but as I discuss shortly, in the second half of my field I began to visit children’s homes as well. I attended many of the school functions during fieldwork, like Republic Day celebrations, Farewell event for Class VIII students, ‘gathering’ (the annual sports event) as well as other shorter “celebrations” (which took place during the morning assembly).

While conversations with students were recorded on an audio recorder, teachers and Head Master did not permit me to make audio records of either conversations with them, or, of classroom proceedings. Thus I relied heavily on field-notes taken during observation and debriefing notes typed after conversations and at the end of each day. Other artefacts like children’s notebooks and official documents were also

photographed. I also took scores of photographs of people, often as a thank-you to the children (on my last day I distributed printed copies to everyone), but increasingly, also as a member of the staff and/or student community who wanted to capture memories²⁶ and used these while writing to 'take me back', or just to inspire and motivate me when I felt depressed, confused (usually about the ethics of researcher-researched relationships) or frustrated, or was mad at myself for not making progress. The photographs remain artefacts of an enjoyable and emotionally intense time in my life. In talks and in the thesis I have only used those students' photographs who had given me permission during fieldwork. Even so I have used photographs sparingly.

I had begun to buy books for the children in order to express my gratitude for their help, acceptance and affection. The books were meant for the entire classroom as a group rather than individual children and I became the *de facto* librarian in the second half of my fieldwork. The books eventually became a source of "data" on children's ability and interest in reading. Except a handful of the fifty to sixty kids who attended school regularly, most children showed a passion for reading: they would remind me to get more books and if I forgot, they even fought with me. I found that most kids could read Hindi quite well, and the few who could not, requested me to get them books with simpler and shorter stories. They also demonstrated a range of different kinds of sense of humour, and reading interests: they did not just want story books, they also devoured popular science books. For example, one of the most energetic and enthusiastic girl in the classroom, Kopal (OBC), who loved to participate more actively in the classroom would often be absorbed on a Biology book on leaves. She would read bits and come running over to me to relate what she had read. Her excitement remains unforgettable. However, she was not seen as a "good" (girl) student by some teachers because of her inability to keep quiet or sit still during lessons. The children also returned books responsibly or informed me if they had exchanged books with another student; some would also sheepishly come

²⁶ A central feature of ethnographic work is precisely this blurring of the line between being a researcher and being member of the community, or, being an 'insider' or 'outsider'. I discuss some aspects of this distinction and its blurring in the last section of this chapter.

to me to apologise for a younger sibling having drawn in the books. Thus, in myriad ways the books offered a window into a new aspect of the children, both individually and collectively; and I have used some of this data in chapter five.

Despite my desire to hang out with students outside of school hours and beyond school premises this was nearly impossible for several reasons: students worked before or after school, they were under strict instructions from parents not to loiter; some girls were subjected to so much moral policing they were wary of even asking parents for permission; it was difficult for me to associate socially with the boys for similar reasons. However, I did plan and execute visits to twenty-two students' homes (including five sibling pairs), interviews with nineteen children's parents (again, including five sibling pairs) and as part of the process, accomplished neighbourhood walks which contributed considerably to my understanding of students' lives and the urban spaces in which they lived and participated. The rationale behind these visits and walks lay in the fact of students being unable or unwilling to relate stories of parents' experiences of work, caste-based exploitation and strategies of survival and resistance. I suggest that they may not have known all the stories and a reason behind this may have been the discontinuity and transition entailed in the families' migration to Indore, which may have rendered languages, narratives and relationships inaccessible in some ways.

At first my suggestion that I might visit homes and met parents was not well-received by most students as they were not sure of the kind of topics I might broach with parents; or, perhaps also because they saw me as an adult who, culturally, seemed to be closer to their teachers. However, eventually, as relationships of mutual respect, trust and understanding (varying in degrees) developed, children were happy – even eager – for me to visit their homes. A more plausible reason was perhaps also the fact that I was someone associated with 'school' and, as such, my wanting to visit homes and families resembled a selection process, thus attributing greater significance to the visit. Lastly, with some children, I simply developed a warm and fun friendship which rendered (at times, multiple) visits inevitable. As evident in chapter four in this thesis insights gleaned through these extra-institutional interactions significantly inform my analysis.

Lastly, I am aware that 'fieldnotes are not a closed, completed, final text: rather they are indeterminate, subject to reading, rereading, coding, recording, interpreting, reinterpreting.' (Atkinson et al. 2001: 3) This means that selection and exclusion are also shaped unconsciously by one's value framework and/or emotional response to a situation. Secondly, the process of taking fieldnotes evolves over time in the field - because of greater focusing of the ethnographer's interests, growing understanding of people and the setting and practical reasons like getting more used to taking notes in a cramped and noisy place (and sitting on a broken chair) all day. I am not claiming that it is a transparent or objective exercise. But revisiting all field notebooks constantly during writing up allowed me to fine tune my understanding of what I had written and if/how that understanding had evolved over time (for example, the state of my relationship with individuals at the time, or my understanding of relationships and phenomena).

Revisiting fieldnotes and interview transcripts *during fieldwork* itself also proved a useful strategy. It helped me step back from the moment in which I'd written a particular fieldnote; at least initially, my emotional reactions to events and individuals were strong and my understanding of what was at stake in the classroom rather lopsided. When I began to re-read my transcripts and field-notes, I began to see the kind of evidence that would be required to substantiate my arguments and claims and that made me take increasingly detailed notes and with time, I learnt to be more alert to the multi-faceted nature of moments and narratives in the classroom. For example, even though I was only focused on the children and particular aspects of their lives, everyone in the school had their own stories and reasons for doing things and as my relationships with a range of individuals and groups grew with time, my way of looking at things also changed, also shaping the notes I took.

3.3.2 The politics of 'ethnographic translation'

Given the sociocultural context where I conducted fieldwork translation has been a significant aspect of my ethnographic writing. The ethical questions and power relations that inscribe ethnographic work, in general, also shape the process of

translation and reflections on it (Sturge 1997). Discussions of the politics of translation have only recently begun to look at the issues that face researchers who are “native” speakers of the language used in the research context; this is important because there are often important differences of ethnicity, class or gender between the (native) researcher and participants (Kim 2012). Being Indian, and/or a native speaker of Hindi, the primary and official language used in Indore and the school, did not automatically rid my ethnographic translation of issues of power and authority. Differences of class, caste, religion and educational levels between me, teachers and pupils permeated our respective patterns of language use, sometimes leading to misunderstandings and ‘missed’-understandings. A striking example of a near-miss was the distinction between *naukri* (job) and *kaam* (work); the pattern of use here was shaped fundamentally by the class location of users. While I have always used the two terms interchangeably the IWC boys in the classroom made a clear and deliberate distinction between the two; *naukri* referred to a regular job (preferably at a desk in an office) with a fixed monthly income, as opposed to *kaam* which could be any kind of paid work with low or no income or job security.

At the same time, being a native speaker of Hindi also meant that I was alert to caste and communal differences in patterns of language use; moreover, having worked with underprivileged children in non-formal contexts I had considerable knowledge of adolescent IWC children’s ways of talking and being. Otherwise, I might have missed the significance of local colloquial usage of words like ‘design’ (used by girls to describe hairstyles) or ‘model’ (a conflation of the ideas of ‘modernity’ and ‘fashion-models’), which I managed to understand despite sociocultural differences between me and the students.

However, Sturge (1997: 22) notes that ‘ethnographic translation’ is a particularly complex process; in ethnographic work ‘cultures themselves are viewed as texts which can be ‘read’ and, indeed, ‘written’ by the ethnographer.’ Sturge (ibid: 22) further notes that ethnographic translation ‘is faced with ‘raw’ words hovering around the mouths and ears that produced them. Immediately the illusory option of ‘literalness’ disappears and the ordering, interpretative task comes to the fore.’ Thus I think there were three kinds of ‘translation’ underway as I transcribed, analysed and translated my data: a) verbal texts (often unfinished conversations) were

converted into written texts to be used selectively and purposefully, b) theorisation of everyday snippets of conversations and events in order to make sense of institutional and social narratives (everyday text to 'disciplined' text), c) translation from one language-culture, i.e., (non)standard Hindi-in-classroom to another language-culture, i.e., standard English-in-academia.

These three processes often operated simultaneously and involved not just the technical work of finding equivalent expressions or ideas (not just words) in another language but also the theoretical and cultural work of making sense of everyday texts and practices. Additionally, it also becomes important to resist possibly racist readings of ethnographic texts and try to enable a conversation on terms set by "third world" researchers and research participants; this is a difficult yet important task given that English remains the language of academia and higher education globally (Kim 2012, Sturge 1997). Thus, ethnographers-translators also need to attend to possibilities for 'subverting' the '(unequal) relationship between the source-language and target-language culture' (Sturge 1997: 23-24). In addressing this issue of unequal relationships I found Kramer's (2003: 99) idea of 'two-way translation' tremendously useful.

Two-way translation is the idea of developing critical perspectives on both, the source language-culture (data) and the target language-culture (theory). On the one hand, my training in feminist studies²⁷ brought me critical insights into im/possible patterns of use in Hindi which, in turn, illuminated aspects of gender relations and women's agency as well as social and institutional relations in contemporary urban India²⁸. On the other hand, as I began transcribing and analysing data during fieldwork I felt the need to reimagine my theoretical framework and draw more on 'southern theory' (Connell 2007). This realisation was driven by the gradual understanding that the way my research participants were enacting resistance in their historically specific social-institutional contexts needed to be interpreted in a

²⁷ Since the language of academia is English feminist texts by both Indian and western scholars are in English.

²⁸ See chapter four for examples.

theoretical framework that could grapple with evolving power relations in India while also allowing me to excavate narratives of subjectivation.

Kramer (2003) also discusses the idea of 'intellectual autobiography' as a strategy to address issues of authority in ethnographic work; this idea goes beyond naming differences between researcher and participants to build an understanding of 'the influence of location on the process of knowledge production'. In two of succeeding sections of this chapter ('Collecting data: how difference limits/enables data-collection'; 'Addressing ethical issues: toward 'decolonizing' ethnographic practice') I have offered an example of my understanding of how class-caste differences between me and the students shaped both, my relationship with them and the production of narratives in/for this thesis.

Lastly, it helped to work with original Hindi transcripts till the very end. While I submitted chapter drafts in English, for my own purposes I worked almost exclusively with data in Hindi till the end. As Temple and Young (2004: 174) note, '[t]he early 'domestication' of research into written English may mean that the ties between language and identity/culture are cut to the disadvantage of non-English speakers.' I felt that I might lose out on important nuances if I moved away from Hindi transcripts too soon and that I might have to revisit my interpretation of what had been said or done. While I was still in the field, I made detailed summaries of most of the interview recordings so I could jot down details of body language, tone and context while these were still fresh in my memory. As noted earlier, translation has not just been about words and technical aspects but about interpreting the meaning of texts encountered in the field. In my summaries I retained many terms and expressions in Hindi; after coming back to the UK I used these summaries to guide me as I produced a fresh and complete set of transcripts and translations. Most importantly, instead of literal translations, I have tried to (re)produce data in English that is as close in meaning-in-context as possible to what I understood the participants to have said in each case. This decision was guided by the realisation that there is no one perfect or 'correct' translation; as Kramer (2003: 99) argues, if translations are seen as "versions' of the original text rather than mirrors, or 'replicas' it affords the translator 'a greater degree of flexibility and creativity'.

3.3.3 Decision-making: excluding and organising data

I isolated teaching practices as opposed to learning practices in order to understand how each group negotiates and articulates expectations, demands and in/abilities; in addition I classified practices according to the aspects of classroom processes, namely, pedagogy, curriculum and moral curriculum. Initially, I had expected the entire thesis to look like the chapter on moral curriculum, but I gradually realised that students' intellectual abilities and motivation were constructed and implicated in specific ways in the teaching-learning of lessons. That is, teacher-pupil interaction around doing of lessons and preparing for tests was inscribed by, and shaped, genderclaste relations between students and teachers. These practices were not always distinguishable from those involved in the transaction of the moral curriculum; indeed, class-based views of working class communities' moral sensibilities and intellectual capacities are often discursively linked (Kumar 2013). However, in the interests of analytical clarity and thesis organisation I divided the discussion into two chapters. Lastly, though I interviewed teachers I decided to exclude teachers' stories in the final version as I needed a slightly different theoretical framework to discuss these stories adequately; and the themes and chapters as they are now offered a more coherent narrative.

Similarly, for the chapter on curriculum I had initially reviewed lesson content of all seven textbooks juxtaposing the ways of being privileged/valued in textbooks to children's cultural practices in and beyond the classroom. However, assessment practices I had observed in the classroom kept demanding my attention though I did not have a coherent story to tell about assessment. Ultimately I decided to at least document and theorise their farcical nature and their centrality to the monthly and annual organisation of pedagogic activity. I struggled with the choices offered by Indian and western literature on curriculum till a more thorough reading of both convinced me that there was need to unpack curricular and pedagogic narratives specifically with respect to children's lives (sociology of knowledge) as well as the specific policies and practices around curricular form and control. This combination of Indian and western literature helped me show both the institutionalisation of particular worldviews in school curricula and the practices that (systematically seek to) exclude marginalised communities from successfully appropriating school

knowledge. The decision was made easy by the realisation that there is a dearth of accounts of assessment practices and policy-practice linkages in India.

3.3.4 Interviewing and being interviewed: managing relationships with students

I began in September 2014 with classroom observations and relatively undirected conversations with everyone who would spare me the time. For the first few weeks I sat among the children on the floor, usually in the rows farther from the dais where teachers stood to teach. With the cramped spaces movement was not possible and I tried to sit in different places so I could talk to different groups of children. Children were variously, amused, curious, wary and welcoming. Eventually, my presence next to them, or my wish to talk to them, began to be seen as a kind of badge of approval even when they were not sure what I was doing there. I began with talking to students in whatever groupings were available; for example, during lunch time I began to talk to the girls who stayed in, finished eating early, or were completing their 'copies'. I began systematically interviewing only toward the end of the second month because it took time to build relationships of respect and trust. Later, one of the girls also told me that they had been reluctant to talk to me because they had expected me to question them on their studies and school subjects.

I also ended up interviewing girls and boys in separate groups because they had begun to study in the same classroom only that year and, as I discuss in chapter six, were both wary of, and uncomfortable with, each other for the majority of the school year. Not only were students more comfortable talking to me in groups, it also seemed fair as I often took up "free" time that at least, till January 2015, was a severely rationed commodity. We sat in the classroom mostly because frequent visits by various bureaucrats meant that Manish Tiwari, the Head Master, was heavily invested in managing the image of the school and the presence of students outside classrooms was definitely a negative image. So we sat in a corner and spoke in hushed whispers, or talked during the short lunch break till December. After December attendance fell thus rendering most of my plans for systematically gathering stories and particularly other data (numbers – incomes, ages, years spent

in Indore) pointless; however, the fall in attendance was also a result of frequent disruptions to school routine in the form of elections, teacher absence (training, election and invigilation duties) and this “freed” up large chunks of the school day so I was able to interview students in the classroom or even in the playground.

Pradeep (UC) – and because of him, his group of friends (Dilshad (OBC), Buntty (UC), Dilip (SC)) – were the first to get comfortable with me. Pradeep’s house was the closest to the school and I began to visit his house and talk to his mother in November and continued visiting them till the end. Among the girls, Nilofar (OBC) was almost the first to talk to me, perhaps, because of the confidence resulting from her star-status and because she was used to assisting the teachers in their work and extended the same support to me. Soon, though, other students were talking to me too; I think it took them some time to figure out that I was ‘on their side’. Taking sides was risky and tricky; for example, once when Ratna (OBC) was slapped by Prabha Shinde and asked to leave the classroom I had to wait a few minutes before following her outside because I was not sure what was more important or prudent: to let students know that I cared, or, to hide from teachers that I did.

There had also been an implicit assumption that I would want to speak to the “good” students only. This became apparent in children’s surprised expressions – and gradually, pleasure – when I requested them for time, remembered their names and what they had told me about their families, joked with them or sat with them during lunch. Though it was not practically possible to have the same emotional relationship with every child I made sure from the beginning that I ‘circulated’ as much as possible and that I was seen to be doing so. The significance of being deemed important enough to be interviewed manifested itself in a vocal, visible ownership of the interviews by students: students like Sarita (ST), Raviraj (SC), Anita (OBC) and Deepu (OBC) constantly chased others away when they were being “interviewed”.

I had half expected the term ‘interview’ to introduce a formality or wariness into what I had hoped would essentially be ‘conversations’, but I realised that the term helped specify not only an unusual activity, but also a particular time and space – howsoever temporary – as reserved for individual students and their stories. Giving it a name made it important, recognisable and possible to *own*. This ownership and

importance were reflected when December onwards students increasingly began to approach me to be 'interviewed' or to do further instalments. This was one scenario where there were no "star" students; and where, despite it being a classroom situation, test scores and classroom performance did not matter. At the same time, for some students, the term, 'interview' and the presence of the recorder was problematic. Sunita (SC) told me that she and her friends had expected something along the lines of a 'job interview' while Roopa (OBC) initially tended to disapprove of the recorder and had to be reassured multiple times that recordings will not be played for any ears other than mine. Lastly, there were rare occasions when students policed each other's speech – use of foul language or rambling accounts – pointing to the recording and urging more prudent language and to 'just say no more than necessary' (Chhaya (SC) during a group interview with girls).

The adult-child relationship to which I refer in chapters two and six also shaped my interactions with students. Given the social construction of this relationship I understood that if I 'put up' with everything (language, actions, views) I would not be taken seriously. Expressing disapproval and disagreement (though kindly and without patronising or infantilising; at times, expressed privately) was a central part of my role as an adult, opting out of which was not possible.

3.3.5 Collecting data: how difference limits/enables data-collection

Following is an excerpt from an interview with Rani (ST) and Roopa (SC) that captures some of the caste-based differences in the way people talk; that is, (re)present themselves and their views and worlds:

Reva: Rani madam, how long have your mummy-papa been in Indore?

Rani: This, I don't know.

Reva: Do you know whether they were living somewhere else earlier?

Rani: Earlier my mummy-papa were living in the village.

Reva: So were they farming or doing something else?

Rani: Yeah, they used to farm.

Roopa: Meaning, since when have they come to Indore? When this...your brother was born?

Reva: She doesn't kn-...

Rani: When my brother Pawan was born, that's when they came.

Roopa: When the younger one was born?

Rani: When Pawan was born.

Roopa: How old is your brother?

Rani: I don't know.

Roopa: Must be...he must be sixteen or seventeen.

Reva: Yesterday...

Rani: Yeah, the one we pointed out to you yesterday (they had pointed him out to me while we were sitting outside during the lunch break doing an earlier part of their group interview)

Delpit (1995) points out in her discussion of class, race and cultural practices how White, middle class patterns of language use – and thus, particular ways of being – become part of the 'culture of power' of the school. With reference to Shirley Brice Heath's work Delpit points out that questions demanding factual information, as opposed to 'questions probing the students' own analyses and evaluations' (p. 56) stories, centrally distinguished Black students' participation in classroom interaction from the (White, middle class) ideal encoded in teacher talk. Similarly, based on Michaels and Cazden's work Delpit shows that White and Black children (may) have culturally different styles of narration – "'topic-centred narratives' being favoured by the former and "'episodic" narratives' by the later (p. 55). As an ethnographer working with students from a range of backgrounds, in terms of familiarity with print and the language of power (that is, formalised, standard Hindi), or in other words, "schooled" ways of speaking/being/thinking, it took me some time to get used to the different patterns. It meant that what we could talk about, how long it took for me to "get at" some of the data I needed and the stories I could finally access, all depended on how the students and I came to an understanding of each other or, how we learnt to (or, in some events, failed to) relate across our socioeconomic and cultural differences. It also meant that generating basic information about family backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions was not possible beyond a point. Many students' and my use of numbers (for example, to indicate height, age, time or duration of events) also differed significantly: they referred to events to locate other events while I was more used to the ways rewarded by formal education. Often students had a different vocabulary to refer to higher education too: for example,

many referred to undergraduation as Class XIII (*terahvin*) and XIV (*chaudahvin*) rather than first year or second year. Such differences in patterns of language use reflected differences in our socioeconomic locations while also capturing (potential) shifts in the way students and I both made sense of the range of relationships different class-caste groups have with systems of formal education (as a result of our interaction).

Data on wages and family incomes was difficult to compile for the following reasons: 1) students often did not know the total amount their parents earned in a month and instead knew the hourly rates for some kinds of labour. Some students did not know even these rates. 2) The situation was extremely precarious with parents having to change jobs/work, or being laid off without notice and even within weeks of beginning. 3) People were not paid at the same rate for the same kind of work. 4) When entire families worked in a unit the contractors paid a lump sum to the head of the family (often the father/husband or brother) on a weekly or monthly basis. Thus, the total income of a family was difficult to calculate without compiling data systematically and its impact could only be understood fully after documenting and classifying the various kinds of family structures – joint, nuclear, single-parent headed, students living alone or with relatives/family friends. I tried for two months to compile this data by gathering information from students and parents but it became apparent that short of a door to door survey this information could not be efficiently collected given the everyday struggles children and adults had to wage. Though this information would have been useful such an effort required far more time than my PhD programme structure allowed and/or a team of researchers working together rather than a lone ethnographer. The kind of surveys that Jeffery et al. (2005) conducted to supplement ethnographic data would be a far more desirable approach to understanding such communities of ‘first generation learners’.

Methodological issues also figured in accessing narratives of caste in my ethnographic work: if the ethnographer is not from the same class-caste background it may take longer for trust to develop between her and the students. This meant that I needed more time to reach out across class, caste and religious differences, to let go of my own apprehensions. In terms of time too, interviews with adult family members would have to be planned differently as IWC lifestyles can be very

uncertain on an everyday basis. Even for short conversations with family members one may have to visit a student's home several times. I suggest that planning a longer stay in the field and factoring in time for work outside the classroom may be useful when one wants to work on cultural differences and their implications. These, I think, are important insights from my study which is one of the few intersectional studies and is by necessity (lack of literature) exploratory in some ways. Lastly, in order to excavate the ways in which caste has worked to shape family histories, it may be more fruitful to work with parents, especially in the case of internal migrants.

3.3.6 Collecting data: analysis and learning to see differently

As Youdell (2000: 112) notes, neither field notes on observation, nor the 'ethnographic text' offer "'true' representation of 'true' identities'. Instead, it is more fruitful to view both fieldnotes and the ethnographic text as products of particular material and discursive locations and relations in and beyond the field (including, for example, researcher's institutional location). However, a feminist methodology enables 'a critical distance on [categories of analysis] and on oneself.' (Grant 1993 quoted in Lazar 2008) This translates into being alert to: 1) my biases and investments in order to avoid reading ideologies into my data, and 2) my own locations and their impact on my emotional, political and methodological choices. Since such a critical distance on oneself can only entail an ongoing effort the only thing a feminist ethnographic text can do is make its own assumptions and investments as clear as possible. That is, 'reflexively analysing the discursive forces in which researcher, researched, and research process as entwined.' (Pomerantz 2008: 25)

Broadly speaking, my analysis of fieldnotes and interview transcripts took the form of thematic analysis (Bryman 2016). I analysed all the data manually and the coding and classification of data began during fieldwork. This was necessary in order for me to ascertain the themes I needed to take up during interviews and the kinds of texts and practices to which I needed to pay attention during observation. I began with simply identifying the various kinds of data I had collected: for example, views, values, practices, relationships, intersections of gendercaste, school infrastructure,

policy issues, policy-practice linkages and classroom-society linkages. Ongoing coding and classification also helped improve the way I took fieldnotes: my note-taking became increasingly detailed and specific as my focus clarified and sharpened throughout fieldwork. I used coloured sticky notes to code (both fieldnotes and transcripts of interviews) during fieldwork and as analysis proceeded after fieldwork I began to code in terms of themes and chapters.

Gradually, as I read, thought and (re)wrote I also began to more fully grasp the significance of a Foucauldian framework, shifting my view of data as fixed worldviews, relationships and behaviours to a view of data as *practices* which constructed both the researcher and researched as subject-objects; trying to make sense of Rancière's notion of political subjectivation was also difficult but grappling with differences between political and governmental subjectivation also allowed me to more fully grasp the analytical power of both frameworks. This shift is also reflected in instances of turning the theoretical lens on to myself: I began to pay attention to the way my view of students, their *practices* and relationships with me had evolved during fieldwork and writing, an example of which I discuss in the last section of this chapter.

While in the previous paragraph I presented the shift from a more ontologically-based feminism to a post-structuralist feminism as a certain kind of "progress"²⁹ I actually ended up holding on to both views in order to simultaneously make sense of material and discursive relations in and through fieldwork. What is important is that I have not used the fact of socioeconomic and cultural circumstances and difference to (rigidly) 'determine' my view or representation of students; instead, I have tried to 'excavate' moments and acts of negotiation and resistance in order to produce a more nuanced and complex picture of how human beings *are* – or *come to be* – within institutional and social contexts while also 'verifying' their equality with everyone else. Thus, the shift – or progress – in my understanding entailed my

²⁹ This implication is, perhaps, simply a result of the order in which I learnt to view power relations and events first one way and then also in another.

learning to perceive increasing complexity and nuances in power relations and institutional practices.

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be understood as a critical distance (Skeggs 1998, Pomerantz 2008, Youdell 2000) from one's project, politics and emotional responses – in other words, from the very reasons that generated the research project in the first place. This critical distance is a *process*, it has to be negotiated on an ongoing basis. Skeggs (1998: 36) writes:

‘Reflexivity is too loose a term to describe my varied attempts to generate distance from overwhelming emotional engagement. These moments did not just occur during the empirical part of the research but also in the writing-up.’

One of my supervisors commented on the penultimate set of draft analysis chapters: ‘there is a lot of anger and despondency in your writing, you need to bracket it.’ (Paraphrased) I was very disappointed; this was what I had produced after what I had thought was considerable ‘bracketing’ of my anger and passionate care for the children; how was I going to further bracket it? Thankfully, this supervisor had underlined, or, encircled every adjective. As I began rewriting on the basis of her feedback I realised that every time I removed a qualifier (*much* struggle, *great* kindness and so on) it made me think of why I had used it in the first place and what purpose it served. The process of removing adjectives became part of the process of reflecting on how to construct arguments for/in academic contexts as well as for engaging a wider range of audiences. Though institutional constraints – and political disagreements – can be vexing and frustrating, I find that rethinking the basis for using particular qualifiers and/or removing these made me think of how I substantiate arguments. It also offered the powerful, though not novel, insight that ‘bracketing’ emotional responses was not (only) about writing style; it was about *stepping back* from immediate and/or emotional responses. This stepping back resulted in a complete rewriting of my thesis: though I still cared, and that care

continued to motivate the writing, I paid far greater attention to nuances and complexities, to data that contradicted and confused my earliest arguments, impressions and conclusions. In other words, the effort to bracket and step back, also made me more accountable and, in a sense, listen to the students and teachers differently. I cannot claim that I “fully” succeeded in maintaining a critical distance on my political and emotional investments, but I learnt the value of this critical distance and continue to do my best to ensure it.

Thus, reflexivity is about ongoing efforts to understand how our multiple locations shape our research relationships (attention to the relationship between ‘how we know’ and ‘who we are’ as discussed earlier in this chapter). Like reflexivity, questions of ethics are also about power/knowledge relations and the ethnographer’s awareness of shaping and being shaped by discourses as well as moments of politics in the field and while writing. I discuss questions of ethics and reflexivity through their interconnectedness in the rest of this chapter. On the ground, issues of power/knowledge translate into questions such as these: how I identify and present myself in order to participate as a member of the community/ies I research; and how sociocultural difference in locations shape research relationships and data collection (reflexivity). These questions are also linked to how I relate to, and represent, others in my writing and how/whether I challenge my complicity in the asymmetric relations of power that enable and limit my research (ethics).

First I turn to the theme of participation. In my case, it was participation in multiple communities, in multiple roles based on social (gender, religion, class, caste, age) and institutional categories (staff, student) which can be stressful at times, as Pomerantz (2008) notes. Altorki (1988) offers insightful discussions of simultaneously being an insider and an outsider, particularly as women belonging to the community being researched. I find these discussions useful more generally to discuss the ethnographer as insider and outsider as well. Pomerantz (2008) talks about how this uncertainty and blurring of identities enables ethnographic work. For example, when talking to some of the parents we related to each other through the shared experience of having grown up and lived in small towns in the north (making *papads*, viewing wedding albums – which invoked a shared experience as women

putting class differences aside for the time being). Similarly, at the school, in conversations with the women teachers I was constructed as a caste Hindu³⁰ married woman which also served to usually (but not always) elide my half-Muslim parentage even though access to the school had been enabled through interventions of my Muslim father.

These were not isolated incidents but series of everyday practices that subjected me simultaneously to codes of behaviour within Brahminical patriarchy as well as institutions like the school (women in public spaces must behave in certain ways, particularly as middle-class, upper caste respectable women teachers): including me in symbolic practices of Hindu festivals for married women (like *Hartali teej*), complementing me on wearing a *sari* or *bindi*, commenting on my weight, age or stamina and the consequences for child-bearing. Yet, as a couple of women greeted me on Eid, I knew that my Muslim identity was not forgotten; I was not sure what to make of the awkward greetings – was it an expression of acceptance? Or an effort to mark difference? Perhaps it was neither; just a gesture of civility.

With the girls, again, there were various parts to be negotiated and often this centred on dress. To be part of the community of young women/girls entails dressing appropriately – and this means hiding and baring the female body in specific ways: when I forgot to drape the *dupattah* that was expected to hide (young) girls' (developing) breasts girls hastened to procure one and lend it to me for the day. Later in the year when I first showed up in a *sari*, the same girls were disappointed by my old-fashioned style of wearing the sari – I was too covered up and the blouse was not low-cut enough! Thus, as Abu-Lughod (1988) and Altorki and El-Solh (1988) note, strategically privileging one identity over the others helped me relate to different groups of people in the field. It can ensure sustained access while simultaneously restricting lines of inquiry or access to certain groups of people.

Participation entailed not only ongoing evolution of identities and relationships, but also shifts in the way I understood women. I had gone to the field with rather neat and tidy categories and sense of right and wrong. During fieldwork everyday

³⁰ By virtue of my husband being an upper caste man.

practices of kindness, acceptance, distancing and policing made me realise that power relations are far more complex than my analytical categories were prepared to handle. I also learnt that often I was not simply 'playing a role'; I enjoyed interacting with people in particular ways, emphasising or eliding particular identities (which part of me or my memories) and that notions of governmental and political subjectivation had explanatory power beyond that possessed by my earlier fixed categories.

The above discussion is linked to questions of ethics because of the 'partially' shared cultural identities (Abu-Lughod 1988: 148) and the question of 'dishonesty' entailed in (mis)identifying in certain ways (El-Solh 1988). For example, under imperatives of access and acceptance I overplayed my roles as (caste Hindu and/or middle class) daughter-in-law and wife. However, as a half-Hindu, half-Muslim girl I grew up donning different hats simply in order to survive and be accepted as a family member (for both the Hindu and Muslim sides) and initially, this *strategic* identification did not bother me. Also at first I was more concerned about safety and acceptance as a *person*³¹ rather than the ethics questions in ethnographic research. In the end it was so difficult to separate the ethnographer concerned about ethics from the young woman/person scared for her safety I just decided to live with the contradiction (since anyway I could not know who did and did not care – or to what extent – about my religious identity). In a way, being constructed and 'subjected' as a member of staff was useful because it rendered the question of religion somewhat superfluous.

3.7.1 Addressing ethical issues: toward 'decolonizing' ethnographic practice

In formulating and addressing ethical issues I find Kamla Visweswaran's notion of decolonization useful. While decolonization is basically a theoretical tool to unravel

³¹ Specifically, because as described in thesis introduction, Indore has been particularly right-wing in recent decades and anywhere outside my parents' home in the city I am always painfully aware of constantly trying to be accepted, if not being inconspicuous.

and challenge the racism inherent in earlier ethnographic studies, Visweswaran's work allows me to use it to more generally engage questions of linguistic, sociocultural and epistemic othering. According to Visweswaran, decolonization is constituted in the twin failures of 'feminist thinking' and 'ethnography. By failure of feminist thinking she means that 'gender ceases to hold the centre of feminist theory' and by failure of ethnography she means 'the field fails to hold the center of anthropology' (Visweswaran 1994: 113). Failure of the field involves a particular conceptualisation of 'home': it is where I 'come from' (ibid: 111), the site of my privilege and loss (acknowledging, interrogating, unlearning one's privilege); or, 'the place where one lives within the familiar, safe and protected boundaries' (ibid: 104). At the same time gender ceasing to be the sole focus of feminist theory refers to a shift to multiple and cross-cutting axes of difference and discrimination. Thus these twin failures demand that I analyse my complicity – and efforts to challenge – oppressive genderclaste relations.

The first point of concern was my class relationship with students: they were working in readymade garment manufacturing units, their parents as domestic and construction workers while I was shopping for clothing online and living in a comfortable house owned by my parents. Though neither I nor the students necessarily constructed this relationship as such in our interactions the materiality of this socioeconomic difference was impossible to ignore: I was spending on transportation what most kids earned in a month. I do not cite this difference in order to assuage my guilt or (simply) record my awareness rather to the materiality of lived differences which affected how comfortable/safe/easy our respective lives were.

Clearly, my research cannot directly intervene in this economics or class relations. Even if it were to inform policy the process will be messy, unreliable and long-term. Rather, what is important is that this difference was partly what enabled me to be the researcher; my control over, and benefitting through the fieldwork (and eventually the credentialing) originated at least partly in my claste position vis. a vis. the students. This relationship also constitutes an ethical issue beyond research relationships: because of the unfair working conditions in which most Indian IWC people work. Moreover, in the Indian context these relationships pose a bigger

ethical dilemma because of lack of clear channels of policy-research or practice-research linkages. Simply publishing theses or papers will not be of much (immediate) use. Personally – and I think some of these ethical issues in “third world” countries can often only be addressed in context-specific ways – I find that there is need for more active involvement in pushing discourses and/or supporting people’s struggles (for example, education, women’s or workers’ rights). Thus possible ways of addressing ethical issues include – making my work available in a range of forms and in Indian languages (for example, continuing to publish in popular media).

This was a materialist account of ethical questions in this thesis. There is another possible account which is more attentive to ruptures, failures (to *know*), inabilities and practices of (de)colonization in ethnographic work. I analyse one such example below:

(The day of this interview Usha Pandey had tried to get Rashmi to read who was extremely nervous and refused to read for a long time though she did stand up in her place with her book. Finally when Usha Pandey began to lose her patience a little Rashmi agreed to read.)

Reva: Hey, why didn’t you read? You read well enough... (turning to Chhaya) why so much drama?

Rashmi: I get nervous. I can read everything.

Chhaya: I also get nervous.

Reva (to Rashmi): [You] use foul language in the class, comment on everyone and talk back...how come you are not nervous then?

[...]

Rashmi: I don’t like reading in the class... I feel shy.

Reva (partly amused, partly puzzled): But not when saying other stuff?

Chhaya: Not shy, a strange kind of nervousness. If at all... any teacher asks me to stand up, even for a minute, I get nervous, strangely so...

Reva: Oh, but you people can read!

Chhaya: I get nervous, then afterwards I make myself ‘feel’ that I am standing in front of so many people... then I answer properly.

In this conversation the three of us are trying to make sense of the earlier episode as well as our different views. I see this as an account of both becoming/constructing certain kinds of subjects as well as (de)colonization. At the time, the way I posed the question constructed the episode as an account of “non-conformation” and “good” vs. “bad” student. My problem was not that she had enacted a “bad” student/girl,

but that since she was already labelled as such, why would she not “redeem” herself by complying. Having been a “good” student and a “good girl” all my school life, I was engaged in this conversation in reinforcing the binaries. The class-caste privilege of having been born to educated parents who were also teachers in the same school had blinded me to the possibility that a Dalit, IWC girl who was relentlessly policed and mocked in the classroom, may not experience academic contexts and tasks the same way as I had. She may go to some trouble to avoid “performing” and being evaluated publicly. Or she may have been venting steam by rebelling and engaging in horseplay (as Deepu (OBC) had explained to me, students often did this). I also forgot that boys and girls may respond differently to such episodes and questions because of the greater policing girls are subjected to. Boys may have joked about it but girls would have found my comments and questions harder to tolerate and felt alienated. Lastly, Rashmi’s comments and refusals could also be ways of asserting herself and/or coping in the classroom.

Eventually, moving between theory and data, and in my effort to make sense of our differences, I learnt to read this conversation differently; in chapter six I show how the girls respectively enacted governmental and political subjectivation and the significance of such subjectivation. I suggest that my efforts to move beyond binaries of “good” and “bad” and engage with political subjectivation constitute decolonizing practice. Thus, as also discussed previously in the chapter, the notion of failure can be used productively.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how my theoretical framework guided my methodology. I began with the fundamental tension between concern for material conditions of students in government schools and a Foucauldian rejection of an *a priori* subject. I have shown how this tension shaped my understanding and analysis of power relations and classroom processes over time. Through analyses of two examples from ethnographic data I have also shown how specific class-caste relations are implicated in the production of this thesis, that is, the specific

knowledge/power relations that constitute this thesis. This analysis allowed me to reflect on the way data collection becomes “difficult” and complicated as a result of class distance and difference between me and the students. This cultural difference shaped the pace and direction of the ethnographic enquiry. In addition, classroom and social gender dynamics and the Head Master’s concern for the school’s image also affected decisions about where to interview students and how to organise groups.

In my discussion of ethnographic fieldwork I have detailed how my prolonged stay in the field helped in various ways: allowing me to revisit conversations, develop relationships of trust and respect and generally develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of relations and practices. As questions and lives extended beyond the classroom I made home visits and interviewed parents in addition to data collection at the school. My discussion of participants’ ‘consent’ has problematized consent forms as adequate or only expression of it both in the Indian context and more generally; and talked about the ways in which I obtained and ensured consent through repeated reminders, reassurances and showing that I cared for students’ preferences in terms of venue, group setting or time.

Drawing upon Kamla Visweswaran and others I have also discussed experience of trying to *practicing* feminist ethnography by turning the analytical gaze on to myself. This practice entailed constant movement between data and theory which shifted my understanding of power relations between me and the students as well as between students and teachers and among students in the classroom. It also guided my discussion of reflexivity in this chapter. I have shown how being both an insider and outsider enabled and closed off conversations. A feminist approach complicated by Rancièrian understandings of dissensus and politics enabled me to pay attention to micro-processes and better engage with processes of contestation and resistance.

I have also shown how such a feminist ethnographic approach – combining feminist reflexivity with a prolonged stay in the field – led to a shift in the political and theoretical lenses I used to understand the world and made me move from neat categories and binaries to an appreciation of complexities. Most importantly, I have discussed both the pitfalls of colonizing practices in ethnographic work and

possibilities of decolonizing through an analysis of a conversation between me and a student that it is possible to move beyond sociocultural distance and othering in feminist ethnographic practice by developing a critical distance on oneself.

Linking my discussion of reflexivity with ethics I have discussed 'dishonesty' in representing myself in the field where my sense of self-preservation trumped other concerns at times. Secondly, I have discussed ethical concerns arising from my class relationship with the students and some context-specific possibilities for addressing these beyond field work and writing practices, for example, through supporting political action or writing research based pieces in popular media.

Chapter 4

What kind of “child” is the student: toward an understanding of urban lives and labours

In this thesis my aim is to understand the ways in which classroom texts and processes (re)produce genderclaste differences and relations in the contemporary urban Indian context. In order to bring out how genderclaste relations shape the everyday context within which children engage with school education I present a critical account of children’s life outside school in this chapter. This discussion is based on interviews with children at school, home visits and interviews with parents. In Chapter Two I showed that a normative notion of “childhood” underpins education policy and practice in India (Balagopalan 2002, 2014; Kumar 2010; Pappu and Vasanta 2010; Vasanta 2004). Such a normative notion denies and silences a range of realities that Indian children negotiate, thus rendering school education not only irrelevant for a large majority but also difficult to succeed at, or complete.

However, there are hardly any ethnographic studies with children that systematically document and theorise these realities, especially with reference to larger economic, social and cultural shifts in urban India. With reference to a research agenda for grappling with realities of childhood and social justice in/through education, Vasanta (2004) argues: ‘we need to study the local conditions affecting homes and schools for both boys and girls; we need to describe the life-worlds of children from the working classes...’ (ibid: 25-26). Thus, for subverting the dominant notion of childhood it is important to critically engage the historically specific and diverse realities of children’s lives.

In order to theorise a subversive notion of childhood and the child’s experience in Indian classrooms I draw upon existing critiques of the normative notion of childhood and feminist analyses of the bourgeois family (Mies 2014) and informal spheres of globalisation (Nagar et al. 2002). In view of Raman’s (2000) arguments³² I also pay attention to the family as an economic and social unit as opposed to the

³² See Chapter 2 for discussion.

individual child. This analysis of the contemporary migrant, informal working class (IWC) family also begins to trace some of the important shifts taking place in terms of gender and class relations in larger society which are relevant to a sociological analysis of education.

I begin with a look at why families migrate and their classed and caste experience of migration and finding jobs networks in the city. I then unpack some of the implications of migration for girls' education, labour, marriage and other rights, desires and (un)freedoms as well as effects of social and economic uncertainty and insecurity on children's schooling in general. I particularly attend to shifts in gender images and roles and the girls' conditional access to education and work. Later in this chapter, I use children's gendered experiences of wage and non-wage labour to understand the general economic condition of IWC families and offer an analysis of the IWC family's relationship with national and international economics. I also offer a Foucauldian analysis of how girls contest and negotiate restrictions on movement and dress and turn themselves into particular kinds of classed and gendered subjects.

A fundamental strength of this chapter is its focus on boys' everyday life beyond school. I interrogate boys' wage and care work in the context of a patriarchal family setup and economic informalisation. The major part of this section is devoted to an analysis of boys' participation in local cultural organisation and politics. Drawing upon my findings, Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) formulation of 'hegemonic masculinity' and the notion of 'vigilantism' (Sundar 2010), I explore how this experience may be shaping boys' construction of gender images and relationships, with particular attention to militant, right-wing nationalist masculinities. Finally, I point to some of the implications of these insights into students' everyday lives for their education.

Thus this chapter presents a rich and nuanced analysis of the complexities of the contemporary Indian context within which education policy and practice must be reimagined in order to address questions of social justice in and through education.

4.1 Internal migration and informal labour(ers)

In order to understand the socioeconomic and cultural context within which IWC children negotiate the notion and specifics of schooling it is useful to attend to the financial condition of IWC families and the way wage labour embeds children's lives. I found that a large number of parents worked as construction workers (men and women), domestic workers (women) or in small manufacturing units (men and women). Others (men) were self-employed – tailors; garage-owners or mechanics; owners of wedding bands whitewashing services or maintenance services; carpenters, plumbers and electricians; auto rickshaw drivers; vendors selling vegetables or street food; and salesmen in small local shops. Wages ranged from the INR 3000 per month that a woman sticking labels on steel kitchenware earned, to the INR 7000 per month that an oil mill worker earned, or the INR 15000 that a self-employed bread vendor made on average in a month.³³

Since almost every student's parents were in the informal sector and very few parents had spent childhoods in cities like Indore I paid special attention to why people had come to this city, how they had found jobs, what work they did and how their particular socioeconomic constraints and opportunities shaped their children's access to and experience of education. The following excerpt from an interview with Rani (ST) brings out some of the reasons behind migration:

Reva: Rani madam, how long have your mummy-papa been in Indore?

Rani: This I don't know.³⁴

Reva: Do you know whether they were living somewhere else earlier?

Rani: Earlier my mummy-papa were living in the village.

Reva: So were they farming or doing something else?

Rani: Yeah, they used to farm.

[...]

³³ Data on wages and family incomes was difficult to compile as I have discussed in Chapter 3.

³⁴ Eventually she remembered that they had come to Indore about seventeen or eighteen years ago. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of how the conversation unearthed this information.

Reva: So tell me one thing, is it your land or someone else's?

Rani: On our own land.

Reva: What all did you grow?

Rani: This – wheat, maize, and other vegetables and all. That, we don't grow. That is, my *bade papa*, they... they are feeding themselves off our land.

Reva: So you don't get anything from that land? But it's yours too *na*?

Rani: It's our land only. That is, they are growing on our land and benefitting. But not giving a single grain to us.

[...]

Reva: Then why [did your parents] come here? For work or education...for children's education?

Rani: For education. There... in the village, there wasn't (*unclear*). That is, when farming couldn't be...papa said Indore. My *chachi ji na*, she brought my mummy here, to Indore. Then mummy said that we will stay here only, we will [make] do and live here.

In another conversation with a group of girls, namely, Bindu (OBC), Rani (ST), Dipali (SC), Roopa (OBC), Bushra (OBC) and 2-3 girls from Class VII³⁵ we once discussed options women potentially have if their husbands ill-treat them (like, wife battering). As the following excerpt shows escape from this domestic violence emerged as another reason behind Rani's parents' decision to migrate:

Rani: This has happened with my mother. My papa did... my papa, right, my papa did...my papa beat up my mummy so badly, beat her up so much, still my mummy didn't go to her *maika* (natal family).

Reva: Didn't go?

Rani: Didn't go.

Bushra: My papa also beat up my mummy.

Rani: See, what happens is, he goes with whatever his papa and mummy say, so my mummy *na*, then brought him to Indore. (As Rani explained later in this conversation this was done with her *chachi's* help.)

Thus migration cannot be explained solely in terms of search for work even if it was often the primary reason. Each family had its own combination of reasons for leaving their town or village to come to Indore. Shah (2006) has also problematized a purely

³⁵ This interview took place during lunchtime and since these girls spent most of their lunchtime outside, sometimes girls from other Classes also joined us. I always gave the Class VIII interviewees the option of not talking in front of others, or of asking others to leave.

economic understanding of internal migration in India. In Rani's case, the reasons for her father and his younger brother to move to Indore included: a feud over ancestral land with the eldest brother, children's education and the ill-treatment of their wives at their parents' hands.

Yet, the process of internal migration is also fraught with hardships and its consequences can be difficult to handle as following field notes from my visit to Dilip's (SC) home show. I had visited his mother as neither Dilip nor other non-Brahman students had been able (or, willing?) to talk about their parents' lives before coming to Indore and I wanted to understand if/how caste-based oppression had shaped parents' occupational choices (field notes from visit to Dilip's home):

Dilip's mother was very young; she told me that she was married off at a mere 14 years of age! She also talked about how they had arrived in Indore after her husband fought with the family and left in a huff. She had to follow him with the children, of course. They had 2000 rupees in hand when they came. And she had to manage food and stuff for young children. He had no network or contacts and had to find new job. Found one as a *beldar*. [...] At one point they used to live as construction labourers-cum-guards in a *kaccha makan* too. That kind of debilitating poverty they have seen.

Dilip's family belongs to a Dalit (SC) community. His father was a construction worker; according to his mother, his father and grandfather had been subjected to forced labour in upper caste landowners' fields. Secondly, caste-tribe location can make significant difference to a migrant family's prospects of survival and wellbeing in the city. Dominant caste men have traditionally been the landowners in rural India and this economic power has been consolidated with their political connections which, in turn, aids upward mobility (Agarwala and Herring 2013, Jeffery et al. 2004, Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1991). This economic and political status helps establish networks and useful contacts when migrating to urban India.

4.1.1 Caste, class and migration

Compared to Dilip's (SC) family's experiences Smita's (UC) father had a significantly different experience of migrating to Indore. Smita's father is from an upper caste (Rajput) family and has many contacts from his community in cities like Jabalpur and Indore. He had to leave Damoh, a small north-eastern town of Madhya Pradesh, for

reasons explained in the following excerpt. I spoke with him at his home and he talked about the jobs he had held in the past and his current job which offers many of the benefits of the formal sector:

Reva: So you are from Jabalpur? Or..? No, you are from Damoh!

Smita's father (SF): [We are] from Damoh but...for some reason [we] had gone to Jabalpur. [...] Began to live in Jabalpur.

Reva: So what did you do there?

SF: In Jabalpur? [We] were in the milk-business.

Reva: Your own?

SF: Yes, that is, we will bring from there and...Were in our own business. Our *saadhu bhai* is there, he was in it. So started as partners, both of us. Then I didn't really get things over there. So we came here.

[...]

SF: Lots of our people are there in Jabalpur. And there are many here too. I said, 'let's come here'.

Reva: So how did you get this work here? Did you already know someone?

SF: Now here, her (indicating Smita) older sister was there, my older daughter. So she could do some 'cutting'. Fabric and so on. So she used to go to company that makes (*unclear*). One [company] here, used to make bags. And so on. Then she got married. Then I said, I, her...that much...couldn't manage enough money. Together we could [manage]. Then I joined a second company, [manufactory name] is there. That's where I go.

Reva: So you are still there? It's been many years?

SF: It's been at least five years in that company. This kid (indicating his older, married son) also goes there. Both sons do.

[...]

SF: So I've been there for four or five years. Working out okay.

Reva: So these jobs that you have, these are permanent jobs?

SF: Yes. Permanent. Took some time to become permanent.

[...]

SF: Get paid on time. The kind of money we get, more than *any other* company. (Pride in his voice)

Reva: Yeah. These people (indicating the sisters) were telling me you have insurance and all that.

SF: [Medical insurance] cards have been made. They give us everything.

In the same interview he also explained his reasons for migrating as well as the distribution of land in and around Damoh:

Reva: So many people have come here from your... Damoh? They work in the neighbourhood?

SF: Here? Here so many of our people, I mean our *samaj* and relatives. Four or five hundred people are there.

Reva: So there was no work there?

SF: There was only this sort of work... Damoh, Sagar and Jabalpur. There is a bit less in Jabalpur but Damoh has a lot of *beedi* work³⁶. And no other such big factories.

Reva: And *beedi* work is no use. (I was referring to work conditions)

SF: *beedi* work has also gone down. That's why everyone...everyone is outside.

Reva: The money in it isn't okay either.

SF: [They] are everywhere (people from his community and from Damoh originally). From Jabalpur to Damoh, Sagar, everywhere. [All] are in big cities. Some are in Gujrat, some in Surat. Delhi. Bhopal. Many of our people are in Bhopal, are in Indore. Make houses. Outside only, everyone. [My girls were] never in the village – only when [they were] a bit younger.

Reva: And no other work is there? Farming?

SF: Farming, we don't have. Those who have it, have it. Those who don't, don't. We don't have it.

[...]

Reva: What other communities live there?

SF: People from many *samaj* live there. Muslims are there. Harijan are also there. Kutwars are there. Yadavs are there.

Reva: And who owns land?

SF: Mostly our people only have land. Many people who own land, quite big people. And (*unclear*) rural area nearby. There... also Thakur³⁷ *samaj* is there. *Badhai* (woodcutter) *samaj* is there [who own land]. All kinds of people are there. Kutwars are there. In our community, a few people are there who

³⁶ *Beedi* = an indigenous cigarette-like product made from rolling the leaves of Tendu trees. In the context of the informal sector the term, '*beedi* work', is used to refer to the work of rolling *beedis*.

It is one of the most organised segments of the informal economy in India (Agarwala 2013).

³⁷ An upper caste group in Madhya Pradesh.

don't have land. All others have it. We also do. But given in my father's time. So now it's gotten really small³⁸.

Clearly, upper caste families also struggle economically, but they have much better networks in cities and past ownership of land allows, at least, some in the family to access education and better jobs. While fortunes of individual nuclear families may vary widely, overall, the community manages to survive in the city through networks (job opportunities, loans, survival strategies) which also means that these families are far less reliant, if at all, on the family and land they left behind. Secondly, role models are available for both boys and girls for completing education and accessing better paid jobs. Smita's father also hopes to have both daughters complete school education.

On the other hand, some of the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste families who have moved to Indore relatively recently have hardly any well-placed contacts, face severe socioeconomic struggles and can never hope to move out of their insecure and ill-paid informal occupations, let alone to a formal sector job. The situation can be so bad that families' like Radha's (ST) and Payal's (SC) may go through days when they have nothing for dinner at home unless the parents bring some money at the end of the day. Such struggling families cannot cut what emerged as the 'umbilical cord' with the native village: for example, part or all of the family may have to go back to the village if they are unable to survive in the city; some families also rely on food grains sent by their extended family in the village. Thus, the nature of internal-migration could also differ across families and, more broadly, caste-tribe locations.

4.1.2 Patriarchy, migration and girls' education

Families that are not sure of their survival may also expect to find grooms for daughters in their native places rather than in Indore. For example, some mothers wanted their daughters to attend weddings back home and use this opportunity to introduce the latter to the community and look for alliances for them. This could also

³⁸ He is referring to the practice of land being divided among sons in each generation which leads to individual pieces of land getting increasingly smaller.

be the reason Radha (ST) did not want to go back to her village under any circumstances. Her father ran a mostly unsuccessful white-wash business; she had two older sisters who were studying in a High School nearby and also worked with their mother as domestic workers. Over the course of an interview, when I asked Radha and Payal (SC) about their plans for the future I received the following response from Radha:

Radha: My father is saying that he will stay here. I (smiling sadly) don't feel like going there. / It is very expensive here. Room costs one thousand. Room costs a lot. Water cost.../ Papa isn't able to save anything. Mummy only runs the house / His...they are there *na*, workers³⁹... other men are there. He has to 'complete' everything before handing over to [owners]. So workers have to be paid / So, mummy papa... [There are] fights every day at home. There are fights because of money. That's why I don't stay...at home. My mind gets very.... / I will study till eleventh-twelfth ...I told mummy that I will study till eleventh-twelfth. Only then (*unclear*) / I will not even go to anyone's wedding (she laughed triumphantly but also looked a little shy at her strategy to avoid any talk of marriage). I said so ...Mummy says [there's no need for] much education. / Too many expenses here. Papa says, you ...all go stay in the village, I will stay here alone. So I said I will also stay here. Won't go at all.

Her past experience is also a reason Radha is so opposed to going back. After she completed five years of school, she and one of her older sisters were sent back to the village for a few months to look after their ailing grandmother (*dadi*). Radha claimed that the break from studies caused both sisters' schooling to suffer and after three years she still had not been able to make up for that loss. However, even if the parents wanted to, they may be unable to ignore summons from family in the village if they doubt their ability to survive in Indore. I suggest that a reason some of the most financially desperate families stick to traditional patriarchal norms is because they felt greater pressure to be accountable to the community and clan back home. Thus, internal migration and the vagaries of informal sector work imply that already marginalised families may live very unsettled and uncertain lives which, in turn, spells gendered instability for children and their education. It is important to remember this socially and economically precarious setup in order to understand pupils' and parents' relationship with teachers, particularly, parents' "failure" to fulfil

³⁹ She was referring to the workers her father organises for each painting project.

teachers' expectations. As I show in the next chapter, teachers expect parents to produce identity and other documents for claiming welfare benefits and/or monitoring their children's performance and progress.

Like Radha, Poonam (SC) also did not want to go back to her village. In an interview when I asked a group of girls where they thought they got the most freedom, except one, all five or six agreed that it was at school. I asked them what they wanted freedom for and they listed: to talk, to play and to roam around. Poonam's responses ran thus:

Poonam: [We] get [freedom] in *iskool*⁴⁰ only. Nowhere else do we get any [freedom]. /When there are very few students present [we have more freedom].../ At home [there is] no freedom. / At my home, if I go out for even five minutes *dadi* will call me back.

But she also added forcefully at the end:

Poonam: I don't want freedom for anything. [If I can] sit at home that is enough. They just shouldn't send me back to the village.

In another interview when we were discussing the extent of freedom girls had in their *samaj*, Preeti (SC), Tara (Poonam's younger sister) and Sunita (ST) clarified why girls hated the idea of going back to their village:

Sunita: *Ver-ry* little [freedom was given]. In earlier times there was none. Nowadays [we] have been given somewhat greater freedom.

Reva: So how would your life have been in the village? If you had to live in the village what would your life be like?

Preeti: Like the lowliest insects. (*keede makodon jaisi*)

(There was some subdued laughter)

Reva: Why?

Sunita: Yeah, that is, girls in the village...

Preeti (impatiently): That is, girls are very little *na*, at that time itself [families] engage or marry them off.

Tara: Yes.

⁴⁰ *Iskool* = is the way almost all the students pronounced the English word, 'school'. Such patterns of (mis)pronunciation of English words also symbolise class locations in Hindi-belt states. In some cases such (mis)pronunciation could also be the effect of one's mother tongue.

I suggest that a question mark over survival and wellbeing of entire families also results in students refusing to – or being unable to – invest emotionally and intellectually in long term visions of their future. For example, when I asked a group of boys from this classroom about their plans after middle school Devraj (ST) said, ‘first let me finish [Class] Eighth (*sic*).’ The fortunes of families could change quite severely from one month, or even one week, to another. Both girls and boys told me during interviews that having to pay fees from Class IX onward constrained their access to further schooling. However, as I discuss in succeeding chapters, the Head Master and teachers do not usually recognise these complexities, struggles and uncertainties or their implications for students’ ability to study regularly, focus on school work, plan for the short or long-term future, or succeed at, and ultimately complete, their education.

4.2 Girls’ lives

Any effort to subvert the ideal child intrinsic to educational policy and practice must engage with the gendered nature of this ideal, particularly, with reference to shifts in the larger socioeconomic and cultural scenario. Therefore, in this section I try to understand how girls experience their families’ views on their education, how demands of domestic work affect girls’ schooling in terms of availability of time, space and energy and girls’ interest, motivation and aspirations and how contemporary and recent phenomena like those of internal migration and informalisation have shaped girls’ responsibilities and roles. Such a discussion allows me to unpack what it means to be a “girl” in this specific context, in terms of their responsibilities, freedoms, desires and constraints. In succeeding chapters I refer to these shifts and views to scrutinise girls’ experience of schooling, more specifically, the im/possibilities of challenging wider genderclaste relations as a consequence of attending school.

In the previous section I discussed the overall financial condition of families and the gendered experience of informal work and migration among families I worked with. When I looked more closely at other aspects of children’s lives at home I found that

apart from their impoverished circumstances the separation between home (*ghar*) and outside (*bahar*) was one of the most fundamental aspects of their lives. This division was, at once, one of the most important causes and effects of Brahmanical patriarchy. Girls primarily had a life inside home and boys had one outside, though as I show later in this chapter, a few of the boys also play important roles at home. However, I have used gender as an organising principles for this chapter because unlike in the girls' case, for boys, the roles they played were optional to some extent. That said, a focus on boys' role as care givers or their relatively greater involvement in managing things at home is also crucial because the experience of doing things differently and of caring for others in specific ways can open up possibilities for them to see gender roles and relations differently.

4.2.1 Caste, class and girls' (un)freedom

The *ghar/bahar* division centrally defines girls' lives, especially, their freedom of movement or lack thereof. Following is an excerpt from one of the conversations I had with Dipali (SC) and Roopa (OBC). With Rani (ST), the two girls formed part of a close-knit trio of friends. I did this interview with the girls sitting in one corner of the classroom and all of us speaking in whispers:

Reva: Like all the boys in your class go to work...so they can get money for their expenses so have you ever wanted to work so you can have money to spend? Like sewing or something?

Roopa (sounding very frustrated): Mummy papa *nev-ver* allow us to go anywhere...

Dipali (chiming in): Yes.

Roopa: ...Never allow us to leave the house!

Dipali: Till now [they] don't allow us to go anywhere.

Reva: When will [they] allow you to go out?

Dipali: No. Never.

Roopa: I don't remember that they [ever] let us go anywhere.

Reva: Where can you go? And where can't you go?

Roopa: Cannot go on our own. [I] can go with [my] brother.

Dipali: And I am myself scared. I am filled with fear even coming from home till here ...Papa or *Chacha* shouldn't come...when I go [somewhere] alone *na*, they say, 'why are you going alone?'

Roopa: [If I] meet someone from [my] class, if I have to talk about some stuff [they ask], 'why are you talking to this person?'

Reva: They keep such a close eye on you, you mean...then you must feel angry?

Roopa: Yes. [I] get very angry.

Dipali: A lot!

Roopa: [I] feel like I should leave all this and go somewhere!

Dipali: Madam (addressing me), really..!

Reva: So then you... When you get angry what do you do? Who do you talk to?

Roopa: We don't directly say things, do we?

Reva: Now like you have to study further... What have they said about education at home?

Dipali: My papa has said '[you] have to study till college'.

Reva: Then [they will] allow you to work?

Dipali: Yes.

[...]

Reva: At what age are girls married off in your *samaj*?

Dipali: For us, twenty years.

Roopa: At nineteen or twenty.

Reva: But then at nineteen or twenty only you will finish college [education]⁴¹.

Roopa: That's not a problem. We will study a little. (She meant that it was okay if they could not finish the programme)

[...]

Reva: Then after marriage can girls work among you people?

Dipali: Yes.

Roopa: Some in-laws allow [you] to work, some may not allow [...] mummy papa say [that you can work] but in-laws [will say, you] cannot. Now they will say, 'yes' and later [they will] say...

Dipali: [Will] go back [on their word].

⁴¹ Usually undergraduate programmes in India are for three years except some professional courses like medicine or engineering which are longer.

This excerpt makes several important points which came up in conversations with other girls as well. Firstly, across differences of caste, religion and tribe many girls reported similar restrictions on leaving the house. Differences in attitudes towards girls' freedom to study further, or go out, turned out to be more a function of a family's financial condition and duration of time spent in cities (even if these were smaller than Indore) than that of caste. Dalit girls like Chhaya and Rashmi, OBC girls like Renuka and Muslim girls like Sameena (UC), Nilofar (OBC) and Seema (OBC) were all allowed to go out to visit friends and with friends (girls) and cousins. The thing these girls' families had in common was the duration of their parents' stay in Indore: all had been in the city for twenty to twenty-five years. They were also more comfortably off than other students in the classroom and all these girls were reportedly encouraged to complete school education and access jobs (for example, as teachers). The differences between these girls related to work after marriage and clothing: the one OBC girl and the two Dalit girls expected greater restrictions on work after marriage and the three Muslim girls had relatively less freedom to wear "western" clothing like jeans and tops. However, all the seven Muslim pupils in this classroom were from families that were economically better off than most other students' and which were investing considerable resources in their children's – both girls' and boys' – education through private coaching.

I suggest that living in cities for longer may affect IWC parents' attitudes in several ways: a) experience of seeing girls from a range of different sociocultural backgrounds go out for education and work without (necessarily) disrupting the patriarchal family setup, b) need for education in order to negotiate various institutions like schools, hospitals, post offices, banks and municipal corporations that are not always as available and accessible in rural areas. Urban life can be far more complicated and education becomes an indispensable asset and c) marriageability of girls. Conversations with IWC girls across castes showed that many girls' sisters were married to men in Indore or nearby cities. Thus, urban families are also trying to find alliances for daughters in cities. Girls from both Upper caste (Rajput) and Dalit families told me that girls' educational qualifications are an important part of their evaluation by prospective grooms' families. Froerer (2012)

and Jeffery et al. (2005) also found in rural parts of the Hindi-belt that education is an important factor in girls' marriageability.

In any case, *some level of education has become the norm in urban areas; what seems to remain uncertain is the level to which a girl may be educated.* It depended on both parents' ability to pay for girls' education and/or family's perception of the "(im)propriety" of a girl's actions. For example, Ratna (OBC) reported this injunction from her mother during an interview in which I discussed love marriages and girls' work and education with Ratna, Smita (UC), Ranoo (OBC), Anita (OBC) and Neetu (OBC) outside the classroom:

Ratna: '[You can] study till any level you like. But if you do something *aisa-waisa* [we] won't educate you.'

The term, '*aisa-waisa*' means 'something wrong' and is a euphemism for a girl getting involved with a boy. There was emphasis on the term in Ratna's speech. For a majority of girls their access to education was contingent upon their behaving "properly", that is, turning themselves into the "right" kind of subjects. The merest hint of any romantic attachment and girls could face anything from a beating to withdrawal from school, or a hastily arranged marriage. In another interview Rani (ST) explained the reason behind parents' haste to marry girls off early with no concern for girls' desire to pursue further education or find work. We were discussing the freedom to work after marriage and the age of marriage in various communities. In Rani's (ST) community this age was 19yrs, in Roopa's (OBC), 20yrs and in Dipali's (SC), 22yrs. Following are excerpts from the interview:

Roopa: Some girls are allowed to do and some are not.

Dipali: In our community, [they] allow [girls] to work.

Rani: In our community soon as [girl] is eighteen [they say] 'girl, you go to your *sasural* (marital home)'.

The girls told me various stories about very young girls being married off and Rani's response linked control over girls' sexuality with endogamous marriage:

Rani: See, once a girl is married off, parents don't have to worry any longer that the girl will run away (and indicating the other girls she continued) so when she is eighteen, nineteen, she will be made to sit at home.

Jha and Jhingaran's (2002) research in rural Hindi-belt also notes this link. Thus many IWC girls' access to education is contingent upon their consenting to the rules laid

down by Brahmanical patriarchy, especially, endogamy. In this matter, I suggest that IWC girls' experience is classed in specific ways; since it is harder for a majority of IWC parents to summon the resources required for their children to complete school education and access higher education or middle-class jobs on the basis of educational success there is often no incentive for the former to bend or break social rules. This is why, within the IWC, financially better off families may show greater support for their daughters' education.

4.2.2 Gender and wage (?) labour

Control over girls' sexuality and reproductive labour works in tandem with control over girls' productive labour. In this section I narrate girls' stories of labouring in/beyond their homes. Following is an excerpt from an interview with Radha (ST) and Payal (SC). As mentioned previously, they were two of the poorest girls in the classroom whose fathers were not able to make much money or save any. Both the girls had many responsibilities at home which left little time for anything else.

Reva: Radha listens to songs and all?

Radha: I am not interested at all.

Reva: Have a TV [at home]?

Radha: TV is there but I never watch. Don't feel like it.

Reva: Wow! Loads of children in your class watch a lot of TV and you don't like it?

Radha: I don't watch much. Mummy shouts [at me] if I turn on the TV.

Reva: Mummy yells at you, that's why [you don't watch TV]?

Radha: I am interested actually. [I] like one or two (*unclear*) ...nature, like, [they] show forests, those programmes I like. But I don't watch that much either.

Reva: Why can't you watch? Studies?

Radha: Yes, studies. [If I] work I miss the programmes. These are only on till four. After I go back [from school] I can't watch at all.

Reva: Why? There are some that come on at night – around eight or nine...

Radha: Go to sleep early. After making *rotis* and all at night.

Reva: What all do you have to do?

Radha: I make *rotis*, and curry, do the dishes, mop up.

Reva: Good lord! No one helps out at home?

Radha: No one is at home, right! *Didi* (older sister) is also not there that's why I am alone at home.

Reva: And no brothers?

Radha: Yeah, [they] are there.

Reva: But younger than you?

Radha (sounding tired): Yes. Got to look after them too.

Radha's situation was the worst but most other girls also struggled under domestic burden of work from which there was no respite. *Except to come to school*. Froerer (2012) and Jha and Jhingan (2002) also found this to be an important reason behind girls' interest in attending school regularly. On the day of this interview Radha had left her two younger brothers locked up in the house alone as she was getting late for school and did not wish to skip it. Pappu and Vasanta (2010) argue these gendered and classed realities of childhood are not taken into consideration in policy or classroom discourses. This labouring IWC girl child is not the "norm", but a "deviation". Nor do Indian child labour laws discuss the girl-child's labour which though not new, has certainly been added to, thanks to migration and the pressure on every single family member to earn.

Such gendered burdens of domestic and/or wage work centrally shape girls' ability to engage with school. Girls' stories indicated that this ability is a function of motivation levels, energy and available time. One of the most direct and obvious ways in which the need to go out for work affected children was their inability to regularly attend school. Geeta (UC) was one of the girls who was unable to come to school regularly because she was a domestic worker and needed to finish work at all her employers' houses every morning before school. Thanks to an alcoholic father and unwell mother, the three sisters (Geeta is the middle one) had to share the burden of work in and outside the home. Apart from Geeta, there were another twenty-odd children in her classroom who rarely came to school. It was difficult to ascertain the exact numbers, but while some were simply unwell or had to travel to the native village often, some were also absent because they had to work. Many children had to either quit work or school when the school timings changed from 7.15AM–12.40PM to 10.30AM–5.00PM and the school day also became longer. For example, Ritesh (ST) and his younger cousin, Prashant, began skipping school quite

frequently when the timings changed. This was ironical because the reason the two boys were living and working in Indore was so that they could get an education, but changed school timings prevented them from attending school.

The gendered ways in which their burden of work affected children's ability to study or attend school were a combined consequence of poverty and Brahmanical patriarchy. Scholars have been writing about the gendered division of domestic responsibilities (Dubey 1988) and consequences for girls' education for a long time (Froerer 2012, Jha and Jhingaran 2002, Kumar 2010, NCERT 2006, Pappu and Vasanta 2004), but policymakers are yet to take this issue seriously. This is where the modernist approach of equality and justice that Kumar (2010) advocates, becomes significant. As harmful and unjust as absence from school may be, there are also newly-emerging forms of harm and injustice that girls like Arpita (UC) experience: the manifold burdens of learning and labouring. Arpita attended school, worked at home and outside it, all the while constrained severely by patriarchal worldviews and values. For example, Arpita told me that she liked to try out different hairstyles but her family did not allow her to do so. She liked to listen to songs but could not touch her brother's mobile phone, let alone buy her own. Her leisure consisted of two television serials she watched at home every night:

Arpita: [I] come back at nine [from work], make *rotis* for papa, then eat, do the dishes and go to bed.

The gendered nature of her experience is reflected in the fact of the *dual burden* of domestic and wage labour and in the specific realities of wage labour:

Reva: So you have again quit work? You were going [in your mother's place] because you mother couldn't go, right?

Arpita: Mummy is still at home only. I go back at three [from school]. Change my dress and then immediately leave [for work].

Reva: And how much do you get?

Sarita (who was sitting with us): Arpita, what work do you do?

Arpita: (to Sarita) Stitching ... (to me) And come back at nine.

Reva: How much do you get for six hours?

Arpita: I'm not given [the money]. *Bhaiya* [gets it]... Now whatever is right, [that's what] we get. Then too we only get a week's living expenses.

Reva: Why aren't they paying [properly] when you are going to work?

Arpita: You see, madam, already [we've] taken so much [loan] from him so now the *seth*.

The reasons for IWC students needing to work are also gendered in the first place. Girls went to work outside their homes only as a last resort, whereas boys went to work for a variety of reasons: family necessity, pocket money, lack of anything better to do and keeping out of trouble. Even though Arpita's academically successful older brother had been the first who had to quit school to start work when their father fell sick, girls like Arpita neither experience any freedoms that accrue to boys from their wage labour, nor have any rights or voice in the wage labour market. Significantly, the reason Arpita's mother had been unable to go to work was because she had had a stillborn baby; when I asked Arpita about her mother having an 'operation'⁴², the girl informed me that, in their village, it was simply not an option. Arpita's experiences demand interrogation of family structures and Brahmanical patriarchy as well as India's education and (child) labour policies within the larger context of informalisation and neoliberal reforms which entail state withdrawal from welfare. Her experiences force us to hold on to a framework of individual rights, 'substantive equality' (NCERT 2006) and gender justice in order to challenge both the state and the patriarchal institution of family. Brahmanical patriarchy does not operate solely through the social locations of individual girls but through the overall institutionalised marginalisation of, and control over, women as Arpita's story shows. Finally, as the foregoing discussion shows the intersections of social class, gender and caste relations shape IWC girls' experience of labouring and outside the home in specific ways that, in turn, inscribe these girls' ability to engage with formal education.

4.2.3 Bodily discipline and girls' "safety": (no) dressing up

Evolving urban discourses of patriarchy are often complex, and even contradictory. Alongside pressures on (some) IWC girls to work outside there is the rhetoric against

⁴² 'Operation' in this context refers to tubectomy. 'Family planning' refers to the husband or wife having a vasectomy or tubectomy respectively to prevent pregnancies.

girls' freedom of movement, usually framed in terms of their "safety" or "protection". In this section I look at how IWC girls from diverse caste groups experience and negotiate restrictions on looks and movement and how these experiences impact their schooling. While harassment on the street is no trivial issue and affects girls' ability to move as they please, as a previous excerpt shows, girls also fear being questioned about their intentions even when walking to school alone. They know that the restriction on their going out alone, often, has more to do with policing their movements than ensuring their safety. Indeed, girls know this well enough that they usually do not report incidents of harassment to families (between school and home) choosing, instead, to handle such issues themselves. For example, Sunita (SC) told me of such an incident during one of our conversations:

Sunita (shyly): Once (unclear) at that time I was *na*, coming... wearing a white dress, and then *na* there was no one on the road. There, I was coming to *iskool* alone, I was coming alone, right, the girl with whom I come was not there that day so I was coming alone....(instructed me with sudden urgency) don't tell teacher, okay?

Reva: I won't tell anything. Whether it's about you, or your home. None of this is going to the other children. And there is no question of anything going to the teachers.

Sunita: So I was coming that day and a guy *na*, he (unclear) his vehicle *na*, and said that 'where are you going?', like that. Near our place [they] come often but they are *na*, like, they *use* a lot (referring to drug use).

Reva: Then you aren't afraid?

Sunita: I get scared, all right! That day, I came crying so everyone was asking 'what happened, what happened' [but] I didn't tell anyone, because *na*, even little things spread...

Reva: Girls in the class too...I know which ones go and tell the teachers.

Sunita: Yes. That's why, I didn't tell anyone. Even didn't tell mummy-papa because mummy-papa (smiled⁴³) like we...someday if my mummy is very angry *na*, [she] is angry someday *na*, then mummy says that [we will] take her out of school...and this and that, that's why.

⁴³ I noticed that all girls did this when talking about their parents and discussing something not necessarily to parents' credit, or which they thought I will perceive thus.

Reva: Yes other girls also have the same fear. That if they tell anyone, then school will be lost [to them].⁴⁴

Sunita: Yes, that's why, till today I've not told my mummy. Then another day *na*, I also yelled at that guy. [He] had come to our area.

Reva: What did you [say]?

Sunita: That, 'why do you [behave] like this on the road?' And this and that (she laughed a little), [I] yelled a lot. Since then *na* I haven't seen that guy.

Reva: No, that's right...

Sunita (sounding more comfortable talking about it now): I said that I will tell my mummy papa also (smiling at her lie). Since then I haven't seen that guy.

Reva: Whereas you cannot tell [anyone] but how will he know that!

(We both laughed at her subterfuge.)

Girls may be blamed for attracting attention and they may be withdrawn from school, not the least because usually parents do not have recourse to other ways of addressing the issue. These IWC girls preferred to walk to, and from, school in groups and assured me that, in groups, they were safe. Alone, or in groups, there were restrictions on their dress as narrated in the following interview with Rashmi (SC), Chhaya (SC), Naina (OBC), Neetu (OBC) and Vaishali (SC):

Reva: What all does your mummy scold you for?

Rashmi: Because of work.

Reva: Only for work? [You aren't] scolded for anything else? Clothes and hairstyles and stuff?

Naina: Hairstyles. [If I] do something with a 'design' mummy yells at me! ('Design' is any hairstyle other than the usual single or double plaits allowed at school.)

Rashmi: [If I] make a 'puff', right, mummy yells at me.

Naina: No! When she leaves her hair loose her mummy yells a lot at her! (Naina, Neetu, Rashmi and Chhaya live close to each other.)

Reva: One minute, so why are you scolded for leaving your hair loose?

Chhaya: [We] are scolded...

⁴⁴ It is interesting that the Hindi expressions cannot easily be translated exactly into English. In Hindi the agency is not with the girls. There is either the passive voice: 'school will be taken out of their reach' (*school choot jayega*) or that parents will take them out of school (*school se nikal lenge*) whereas the easier sentences in English are one where girls have the agency to 'quit' or 'drop out'.

Rashmi: No, I... (*unclear*) if I make a plait, like this (indicating that her hair would be on one side), like this if I leave [my hair] untied, then she yells at me.

Naina: [My mummy] doesn't yell at me but it doesn't work for me (lose hair).

Neetu: I don't do [that] at all.

Reva (to Vaishali): What are you scolded for?

Naina (grinning and shouting): [She] is scolded, [she] is scolded! When she makes a 'puff', her mummy...

Vaishali: [I] don't make it at all. That's why I did it like this today (indicating her two simple plaits). Mummy was right in front of me. One day when I did it, mummy did this (gestured to indicate that her mother undid her hairstyle) and ruined my hair [style]. (Grinning impishly) I did it again. (*Unclear*) 'Every time you ruin it, every time I will do it!'

Reva: So why can't you let your hair lose around your shoulders?⁴⁵

Naina: My mummy doesn't ask me not to, but I don't like it.

Neetu: I leave my hair lose around my shoulders but if I make a puff like this my mummy-papa yell [at me].

Reva: Why?

Neetu: That is so because in the village we used to do it like this (indicating a plainer style). [They] say you have lost your way (*bigad gayi ho*) after coming here.

Naina: [They say] 'you have become fashionable'!

Neetu: 'You have become fashionable', like that!

Vaishali (sounding very frustrated): And then, others in the neighbourhood also keep saying things, right!

Thus, sometimes hairstyle becomes more important than clothes; while more "modern" clothing is alright any evidence of taking pains with one's hair or face is seen as crossing a boundary. Rashmi (SC), Chhaya (SC) and Shweta (UC) said they were allowed to wear jeans but were forbidden from wearing any eye makeup. Such narratives of restrictions across caste groups on girls' clothing, hairstyles or movement reflect the range of ways in which their sexuality is sought to be controlled within the logic of endogamy that is, Brahmanical patriarchy. Girls are

⁴⁵ In this case a rather involved conversation will reveal that the taboo was based on superstitions. However, Brahmanical patriarchy has traditionally linked women's chastity with restrained hair; so a link between the social mores and superstitions may not be difficult to imagine.

expected not to be interested in, let alone express, their sexuality. Lastly, one must also remember that IWC girls and their families also have greater reason to worry about safety and law & order in their neighbourhoods (Chakraborty 2009).

That the girls were supplementing each other's accounts is also significant: they clearly share their experiences of restrictions, and resistance to these, with each other. I suggest that given the restrictions on their movement and interactions, school becomes the only space where they can talk to other girls, make friends and find comfort and support. It is the only space that is legitimately and regularly accessible. This solidarity and emotional bonding is an unintended and unexpected advantage of IWC girls' access to the public space of school; and as such, offers a powerful reason for developing schools as spaces that *enable* rather than *police* these girls' speech and relationships.

4.2.4 Turning themselves into subjects: 'model but medium'

What the foregoing excerpt captures is not only the restrictions but also the experience and experimentation that goes into negotiating these restrictions: giving in at times, challenging parental authority at others, and simply trying them'selves' out in a series of moments and episodes. Girls are also trying to negotiate the kind of person they want to, and can, become in an urban context saturated with images of women dressed in certain ways and girls completing school, studying in colleges or taking up jobs within specific logics of patriarchy.

One moment during my visit to Shweta's (UC) home captured this constant effort at negotiation various ways of being a "girl" particularly powerfully. Shweta and Shivam were twin siblings studying in the same classroom and I had gone to see their mother. Eventually, I was left alone with the children as their mother had to go out to run some errands. I had my trusted little camera with me and the kids began taking pictures. At one point, Shweta, who had on a pair of black jeans and a navy and black top, requested that I shoot her on the terrace outside their one room-cum-kitchen house. The moment I agreed to do so, she whipped off the slim band holding her hair back in a ponytail, with a flourish, expertly shook her hair free, arranged it around her shoulders and was ready to face the camera with a look in her eyes which

was very aware of the picture she made. The transformation – and its speed – amazed me. But, the fact and moment of transformation in her mother's absence was what captured, and revealed to me, the pressures and pleasures an adolescent urban IWC girl, from an impoverished household, may experience as she negotiates the various selves she desires – or, is required – to be(come).

When questioned about restrictions faced by girls in matters of clothing Shweta had argued succinctly against “western” clothing during an interview with a large group of girls in the early stages of my fieldwork, in the following words:

Reva: Why do you like skirts better than salwar kurta⁴⁶?

Shweta: Because it is ‘model’. (‘Model’, a conflation of the idea of “modern” and the visual symbol, the women ‘models’, was the word girls used instead of the term, ‘modern’.)

Arpita (UC): When we were young [we] liked it. Now that we are grown up, now [we] don’t like it.

When I asked for a reason there was silence at first. After a few prodding questions I asked explicitly if they would wear skirts if it were a girls’ school and Ranoo agreed that she will.

Reva: Is it also that you worry ‘what will people say’? Or, you don’t like it?

In unison the girls shouted back: ‘What will people say!’

Shweta: People will say something, that, [and] we live by what our mummy, papa say. We live within that (those rules and regulations).

Later, in the same interview, Shweta talked about how she responded to her brothers’ irritation at her hairstyles:

Shweta: Both my brothers, both – the older one and this, Shivam – both get irritated with me. Then I irritate them so much, [I] irritate them so much...because I don’t like being very ‘model’ either...I like it, but should be ‘medium’. And when...if someone gets irritated, then I feel, ‘oh...’ (her voice tapered off indicating disappointment but a second later she picked up as spiritedly as earlier) then I will irritate them even more [by doing my hair stylishly]!

Similarly, in another interview, Sunita (SC), with her desire for jeans and the nerve to handle offensive men on the street, had told me that it is the girl’s fault if she

⁴⁶ *Kamiz* or *kurta* = the loose traditional tunic girls/women wear in India. *Salwar* = traditional bottoms worn with the *kamiz/kurta*.

dresses too attractively when going out. Such discrepancies in girls' views capture the way subjectivity is produced through girls' participation in contradictory discourses and represent girls' efforts to follow the 'model-but-medium' route. Girls are expected to study, be assertive in the classroom and be smart enough to participate in the school's pedagogic and administrative processes yet remain submissive and silent in all other contexts. They must go out to work if necessary, but must not demand access to their wages, or the right to spend on themselves.

One of the reasons girls turn themselves into certain kinds of subjects through various 'technologies of the self' (Atkins 2008) is the threats they perceive to their precious few existing freedoms. The freedom to leave the house to go to the school and spend time there, being one of the most precious. Rani's (ST) brother had beaten her up one morning before she came to school because he had picked up some gossip from his friends about her alleged interaction with boys in her classroom. He had also threatened her with withdrawal from school after she completed that academic year.. Apart from the social and emotional aspect of attending school there are also the credentials school can provide, thus potentially allowing girls to access jobs. That is why, I suggest, many IWC girls accept certain compromises and fiercely protect this one precious freedom of attending school.

Kannabiran and Kannabiran (1991) argue that it is important to grapple with changing contexts and relations rather than taking an ahistorical approach and essentialising (genderclaste) identities and relations. I suggest that the reason IWC girls are being policed in particular ways and offered conditional access to schools is the cultural and economic change their parents' generation is experiencing. Particular kinds of participation in the economy and in public or state institutions has become inevitable with colonially imposed modernity, and more recently, neoliberalism, migration and informalisation of economies. In these unfamiliar times and places parents are also struggling to maintain some order in their lives and the sexual division of labour and gender roles and relations are a fundamental aspect of order within families and communities. Though elopements were not a novel idea, almost every girl I spoke to told me a story of elopement in her family and the consequent amplification of restrictions on those who remain behind. However, again, I found that financially better off families who planned to support their

daughters' education, did not amplify restrictions even when daughters/nieces ran away to marry men from other communities. Lastly, in response to various restrictions, IWC girls also create their 'third spaces' (Chakraborty 2009) away from the policing gaze of family members or school teachers (as examples above show) and seek to subvert patriarchy as it shifts shape and brings them to urban work places, schools, friendships and avenues of consumption.

4.3 Boys' lives

I showed in Chapter 2 that there is only a limited body of literature in Indian sociology of education on boys. My discussion of boys' life beyond school adds to existing literature by offering insights into wage and other work in which boys engage as well as their participation in local politics and cultural organisation. More specifically, I attend to the socioeconomic constraints under which they labour, their responses to these constraints, their responsibilities as well as their interests and concerns. Such an interrogation of school age boys' experiences beyond the classroom help understand what it means to be a "boy" in particular communities and at this particular historical juncture in urban India.

4.3.1 Wage work

I begin with an example of the kind of burdens and opportunities a young boy may experience in a socioeconomically marginalised context where the only jobs available are in the informal sector. Following are several excerpts from an interview with Prakash (OBC) whose father had died a few years back. His mother and he lived with his father's brothers as a joint family. His father's family had been living in Indore for more than forty years.

(I had been confused about the number of jobs he worked and how he had obtained the jobs and Prakash had been explaining patiently.)

Prakash: I have three *bade* papas right, [they were four brothers]. One [of the brothers] was my papa only. He passed away. And one more [brother] is there – he also passed away.

Reva: Okay.

Prakash: Now my *dadi* also passed away.

Reva: Yes.

Prakash: Three passed away. How many left at my home? My papa isn't there. And one more *bade papa* isn't there. His son [is] grown up, so [that's] good... Two sons were there – good, grownup. Then [they were] looking after their father's business. Their father passed away so they began to look after the work. And they started taking me with them.

Reva: You also go there?

Prakash: Yes. And one more *bade papa* is there. Because two passed away and another *bade papa* was there right? He used to have a *thela* (hand cart). He used to do this catering work also. So he, you know, he got me some work [in a shop] opposite him. That is how it is. (With a smile), now you understand?

During the wedding season in Indore⁴⁷, Prakash works alongside his uncle and cousins on the latter's catering business. In the off-season he works at a shop that sells electrical goods. In the following excerpt, Prakash enthusiastically lists all the jobs he could perform as a member of the catering team:

Prakash: I can also work with machines! Used in catering, you know, *ba-ffat*.⁴⁸

Reva: I don't know. You tell me.

Prakash: That '*gudiya ke baal*' is made, isn't it? '*baraf ke laddu*'... (He named popular local street food items)

Reva (finally catching on): Yes! That machine...you have worked it?

Prakash: [I have] worked the one used for *baraf ke laddu*, [worked] the one for making pop-corn⁴⁹. And *gudiya ke baal*.

(Interruption: a student wanted to know what 't-h-r-o-u-g-h' was. We were sitting in my usual spot near the door and on one edge of the dais for our interview. There was no teacher in the classroom and the Head Master was managing both the classroom and his usual administrative work.)

Reva: So, then do you get good money?

Prakash: Yes.

⁴⁷ The majority of weddings take place between October and March in Indore.

⁴⁸ He was referring to the buffet dinners offered in wedding receptions in Indore and he pronounced buffet – ba-fat each syllable pronounced fully and clearly.

⁴⁹ Used the English word, pronouncing it, '*paap-kaarn*'.

Reva: How much did you get?

Prakash: [I] used to get hundred rupees [per day]. I used to go at five [PM], returned by midnight.

* * *

(We had been discussing the distribution of work at home which his mother and sister took care of.)

Reva: And what do you do at home?

Prakash: I? I go to work, don't I?

Reva: At what time do you go [to work]? And what time do you get back?

Prakash: I go after *iskool* [around 2 PM] and come back by eight.

Reva: And you eat something when you get home [after school]?

Prakash: Yes. *Iskool* too...take [some food] to work too. [I] take my 'copy'⁵⁰ too.

* * *

Reva: And how much money does [your] mummy get?

Prakash: Mummy gets...three or four thousand [rupees].

Reva: And how much do you get?

Prakash: I get three thousand [rupees] now. (This is at the electrical goods shop.)

Prakash also told me that his mother fell sick often with what the doctor diagnosed as typhoid. Then she had to take time off and as there is no notion of sick leave in the unorganised sector in Madhya Pradesh, it was always leave without pay. Typhoid was the most commonly named illness by students in the classroom. Jaundice was the next most named. Ill-health was at phenomenal levels in these families; both adults and children in IWC families suffered from a range of health issues which affected their ability to work and neither seemed able to take adequate leave to recover.

* * *

Reva: What all [games] do you play?

⁵⁰ 'Copy' = When speaking in Hindi, this is the term used for the 'school notebook'.

Prakash: Hide-and-seek, *pakdam pakdai*⁵¹, bat-fuddi.

Reva: Where do you play? On the road outside your house?

Prakash: Yes.

Reva: Is there space? Don't vehicles pass by? Big ones?

Prakash: Not big ones. Only small ones – bicycles and these [two-wheelers] come.

Reva (nodding): Small ones only...

Prakash added: And if there is some work going on at someone's house then big ones come with gravel...

Reva: Okay, do you know what your father used to do?

Prakash: Yes.

Reva: What?

Prakash: He had a *thela* for selling sandwiches.

The above excerpts show that urban neighbourhoods do not offer IWC boys much space or opportunities for leisure, particularly, if they have serious financial responsibilities like Prakash did. Prakash had to work hard to support his family and had little time to himself outside of school. I suggest that the lack of leisure, the hard work and the seriousness of their responsibilities may also contribute to a lack of engagement with classroom teaching on the part of some IWC students. Moreover, as I argue in chapter five, while IWC children could not fulfil the cultural and educational requirements at school their having to earn and learn new skills outside school has implications for constructions of their intellectual ability within classroom discourses.

In addition to financial condition, caste also seemed to be a factor in determining which boys most needed to support their families. While upper caste boys also went to work a larger proportion of UC boys reported it as being out of choice – as opposed to need – compared to OBC, SC and ST boys. But this preliminary finding needs to be explored further as the UC boys may also be more embarrassed to admit to financial need. Boys also opened up to me about their family's financial conditions a bit later than the girls in the classroom did; this might be a reflection of the socially important

⁵¹ It is a game played by a group of children where one child runs and tries to catch the others.

role that men/boys are expected and perceived to play in determining a family's socioeconomic status.

4.3.2 Care work

Besides their waged work, some of the boys had many responsibilities at home. This was usually because: 1) they had no sisters or the sisters were younger than them, 2) sisters spent much of the day away for work or studies, 3) boys had chosen to take on certain responsibilities of care. For example, there was Deepu (OBC) whose elder sister was at an engineering college so he helped out at home; Rahul Singh (UC), whose sister worked with their mother as a domestic worker, and who washed up, cleaned the house and sometimes 'tried' to make *rotis* for his mother⁵²; Mahesh (OBC) whose older sister was married and who seemed proud and happy to help his mother at home; Aalok (OBC) who only had an older brother (who did not always keep well) and the brothers shared responsibility for household work with their mother; and Akash(SC), both whose sisters were much younger than him and he cared for them after school, making them tea, ensuring they did their homework and generally taking care of the house till their parents returned from work. There was also Dilip (SC) who had a different sort of responsibility of care as his mother explained (field notes from home visit mentioned earlier):

Dilip's mother told me about her husband's drinking and how her other two sons sometimes answer back or yell but Dilip is different. He might cry but he won't say anything. / Dilip is the quiet, sensible one who would ask the older brother also to shut up. / Dilip apparently loves taking care of animals; his mother said, 'there was a *maina* earlier. She died...he has to have something [to take care of].'/ Dilip's father is apparently quite caring and loving when he isn't drunk but usually he is. / The mother's hopes and expectations lie with Dilip; she told me that [in] her natal family only one other kid is doing well. None of the others are. She herself attended school till Class II or III and she had never gone to her children's school in the village. Only in Indore she goes with some other women if needed.

⁵² Excerpt from interviews with Rahul Singh are available in chapter six. He told me that he tried but could not make *rotis* properly.

However, it emerged that IWC boys are often viewed as troublesome, uncaring, irresponsible and potential predators both at home and school; as a result, their stories are generally seen as less believable than girls'. There was an incident involving Mahesh (OBC) when he and Namit (SC) had been asked by a teacher to mind the class one day. At one point, Mahesh asked a girl to keep quiet and not laugh. According to Mahesh, she then deliberately stepped on his foot when leaving the class and he hit her back. That afternoon on their way back from school (they were from the same neighbourhood) another boy commented offensively on that girl. Since Namit and Mahesh were walking a short distance from her she used the opportunity to blame the incident on Mahesh – that he had incited the other boy to harass her. She reported this version to Mahesh' parents as well. By the next day she had begun to say that Mahesh had been the one to harass her.

Reva: I feel that sometimes boys get caught because people start doubting boys quickly. If a girl says something [people begin to] doubt boys easily. People don't trust boys...

Mahesh: Madam, isn't it? At home, too...mummy also says that, 'is that girl lying then?' This is what she says!

Some of the boys also reported that they had to be very careful in their neighbourhoods as people yelled at them at the merest suspicion that they were even looking at a girl. Two girls in the classroom also told me that people in the neighbourhood had beaten up young men accused of harassing girls. I suggest that this fierce policing of boys is (also) a result of the fast pace of demographic and cultural changes: migrating to unfamiliar and very densely-populated cities and having to live in neighbourhoods where families are still in the process of building networks and developing feelings of belonging and community, they end up resorting to more brutal ways of policing young people. This is also a direct consequence of communities wanting to "protect" and "police" girls. Thus, under the imperatives of Brahmanical patriarchy, in a changing world boys, and girls are caught in some of the same traps, albeit in gendered ways.

Thus, in this section, I have shown that IWC boys have specific financial and caregiving responsibilities; they also face serious deprivations and worries as well as some amount of gendered constraints on their behaviour. However, at school, none of these circumstances or their effects on IWC boys are appreciated. Their

responsibilities, concerns, fears, desires and emotional investments in family or school are not valued. Thus such ethnographic work with adolescent boys opens up ways of rethinking dominant conceptions not only of childhood but what it means to be an IWC “boy” in the contemporary urban Indian context.

Though the six UC boys seemed to be financially better off, to a large extent, caste did not seem to be a significant factor in determining the kinds of responsibilities that boys bore. Among IWC communities, any emergency can immediately throw a family into a state of financial desperation irrespective of caste. The difference could be that upper caste communities, as I showed in the context of migration, may have better networks and/or be better able to work their networks in case of emergencies. At the same time, I also found that students either did not readily speak about caste, or having moved to Indore at a very young age, did not fully know their parents’/grandparents’ life histories. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is worth exploring if students will speak of religion and caste based difference and micro-aggressions more comfortably outside school.

4.3.3 Local politics, cultural organisation and public “masculinities”

In this last section I offer a discussion of IWC boys’ participation in the political and cultural organisation that characterises Indore. I show how this cultural and political experience might be shaping boys’ ideas understanding of social relations, particularly, those based on gender and religion. Additionally, this experience also reflects some of the gendered and classed resourcefulness that these boys needed to develop in order to survive in this specific urban context.

Many boys I interviewed spoke of boys’/young men’s groups in the neighbourhood that organised cultural events in the locality. I became interested in this aspect of IWC boys’ lives because they took it extremely seriously; in some cases, it dominated their lives to the extent that they skipped school for it and spent considerable money, time and energy on it. Membership in these groups not only shaped these boys’ participation in school and the public sphere in other, more significant roles but also a range of “masculinities” as particular kinds of public identities. Once again, caste did not emerge as a factor influencing participation in such groups. At least,

based on data from this classroom it seems that boys across caste locations were involved in neighbourhood groups to varying extents and in varying capacities. However, further research would be needed to understand if/how caste shapes individual boys' participation *within* these groups. For example, the boys who spoke of having leadership roles within their group belonged to upper caste groups.

For its members these groups also served other important purposes: networking and guidance in matters of work as well as moral and material support when conflicts within or between groups developed. For example, Devraj (ST) told me that anyone who wanted to live in his neighbourhood had to know how to fight (back). Local groups varied in their strength, frequency and intensity of activity and degree of intimacy with local politicians and electoral politics. However, there were certain similarities: violence (though at different scales and for different reasons), especially in the form of vigilantism, was an essential aspect of such groups; they were all involved in collecting donations from the neighbourhood and organising cultural events.

Broadly speaking, I could identify two kinds of groups – one was more informal, less well-defined in terms of mandate, membership and political support and may not even have a name. Their activities entailed hanging out with each other and protecting the interests of their members, particularly when conflicts developed into physical fights. The other kind was organised along the lines of a *Mitra Mandal*. *Mitra* is the Hindi word for 'friend' and *mandal* is the word for 'committee'. *Mitra Mmandals* are groups organised by young men across neighbourhoods in Indore to celebrate cultural festivals as well as possibly being involved in the activities listed above. These *Mandals* are often affiliated to, or supported by, local political parties.

Pradeep (UC), his brother, Vikram and their friend, Bunt (OBC) who was in Class IX in a nearby High School, were in the same neighbourhood group. Pradeep led this group to which he had given an English name, 'Happy Group'. Namit (SC) was part of another group, which did not have a name, and was led by an older man in his twenties whom Namit called Babloo *bhaiya*. Other boys like Aalok, Rajesh and Aman belonged to different groups in their respective neighbourhoods. These groups did

not have a name but organised cultural celebrations, the members hung out together and were, at times, involved in violent incidents.

Political connections and recognition in the neighbourhood were important rewards of this cultural participation thus also drawing the boys into the larger arena of political activity in Indore. For example, Pradeep's (UC) eyes and voice conveyed his excitement every time he spoke of the (Hindu) religious events organised by his group, or of local politicians he had met or who had attended these events. He was inordinately proud of the fact that the BJP⁵³ extended moral and financial support to his group and of what he saw as the party's trust in them (evident, according to Pradeep, in the lack of any accounting of funds). In contrast to this local political and social recognition IWC boys like Pradeep found school teachers and the Head Master singularly unappreciative of their organisational skills and unenthusiastic about organising events. It is this recognition (*naam/pehchaan*) that, I suggest, is a key incentive for IWC boys to join these groups. Secondly, this cultural-political work, as well as, at least, some kinds of waged labour produce more *immediate* results. The concreteness of this work and its rewards – be it status, recognition or money in the form of wages – may render this work more meaningful than school work for IWC boys across castes. This is a theme I revisit in the next chapter.

4.3.3.1 Othering: gender, religion and the neighbourhood groups

The rewards and recognition also take another significant form: that of higher status in the neighbourhood. This status is reflected in power over, and the assured loyalty of, boys/men in the neighbourhood. The following excerpts from an interview with Pradeep (UC) and his younger brother, Vikram, at their home, suggests that this status came largely from their fighting prowess and the strength (numbers) of the groups one belonged to, or, led:

Pradeep: My group, if I break away then all fifty guys will come to this side.

⁵³ The BJP is the ruling party at both the state (Madhya Pradesh) and central (Government of India) levels.

Vikram: And for us, it's like, if [someone] hits one of us then everyone will come and beat them up.

Pradeep: Like, if someone touches me or him (indicating Vikram)...

Reva: How do you decide who is right and who is wrong?

Pradeep: Like if he is in the group...

Vikram: Our...we don't see [right or wrong]. If the two of us fight (indicating himself and Pradeep), and these guys are from my team, they start beating up him (indicating Pradeep), right, then the guys who come to support [Pradeep], right ...won't listen to my guys... they will listen to Pradeep. Even if they also know my guys.

[...]

Pradeep (confidently): [All the guys] who support me, where I live, in that place no one can lay a finger on me.

Reva (half-seriously): Nor Vikram.

Pradeep: He is my *brother*. If someone touches him, my,...I go mad! (indicating Dilshad and Dilip who were also present), I don't allow anyone to lay a finger on these two either! These [guys] don't tell me. Keep things hidden.

Dilip (more quietly): I've not had any fights so far.

While Dilip systematically avoided conflicts in and outside school Namit who was also from a SC community, was very active in his group and offered me detailed accounts of various violent incidents he had been involved in. This could, again, be because Namit's family was financially better off than Dilip and he had spent almost all his life in Indore. His specific circumstances could have enabled a different set of networks and possibilities of horizontal mobility for Namit. Based on earlier discussions in this chapter I suggest that caste hierarchies interact in complex ways with a family's economic and cultural resources to produce a range of cultural and economic possibilities for adults and children as well as a range of practices in terms of negotiating social institutions and genderclaste relations.

The kind of local power that Pradeep and Vikram seemed to be able to exercise feeds on, and drives, local tendencies toward 'vigilantism'. This vigilantism targets a range of behaviours from tobacco use and drinking to (alleged) cow-slaughter. For example, Mahesh (OBC) explained in an interview, how Namit's (SC) group indulges in violence over trivial things:

Mahesh: You know how it is, now all people are not the same... [If] someone bumps into them a bit on the street, things get to name calling and abuse.

Then these people from Namit's group start fighting (physically). So then things start getting worse. Then they, they...all start beating [the guy] up. / Like, now, one day a drunk guy was walking down the road...so he was walking like this (indicated a wobbly walk). So they *na*, beat him up and tied [him] up and left him in a car. This is wrong *na*, he was going on his way, what's it to do with us? Namit says '[that guy] ruined the atmosphere of our colony'!

Namit insisted in, at least, two of our conversations that their leader, Babloo *bhaiya* (caste not known), had clear guidelines about not beating up an "innocent" person. But as Vikram says above, in the heat of the moment no one worries about who is in the right and who is not. Thus there are two related problems here: one, that violence becomes normalised as boys organise themselves into neighbourhood groups negotiating power and status. Two, rigid binaries of "good" and "bad" are developed and legitimated which derive their meaning from religious or gender differences and conflicts as well as shaping these differences and conflicts. In Indore, religious difference and communalisation of social groups and relations has been a particularly worrying trend. My data shows that: 1) boys in these groups as well as residents who are not members have been involved in lynching Muslim men accused of stealing and/or killing cows, and 2) that these groups have a relationship with the ruling BJP and its affiliates like the Bajrang Dal whose political and social capital has traditionally derived from their militant, right-wing Hindutva stance⁵⁴ (Menon and Nigam 2007). Sundar (2010: 114) has also noted such 'localized' and 'spontaneous' vigilantism on the part of 'ordinary people' in India. Following excerpts from an interview with Rajesh (SC), Aman (OBC) and Aalok (UC) offer an example:

Reva: Hey, have you heard of these [stories of] cow-slaughter? Seen videos and stuff? WhatsApp...do you use WhatsApp and all that?

Rajesh: Yes, [we] have seen [the videos].

Aman: I've also seen [those].

Reva: Okay, so these people....have there been fights because of that in your colony?

Aalok: Once we caught a guy who had stolen a cow. Beat up him badly, *we* did!

⁵⁴ There is no clear evidence in my data of direct relationship of the BJP or the BD having instigated the violence against the accused Muslim men.

While these local, IWC boys' groups are not the only people involved in violence against Muslims in India I suggest that such groups serve two purposes: link communities with political parties and enable mobilisation around "communal" (Hindu-Muslim) conflicts and two, help normalise violence. Although these boys have begun to participate in *mitra-mandals* and vigilantism in a historically specific context, Sundar (2010: 114) cautions against seeing vigilantism itself as a novel phenomenon because such a view 'conceals the way in which states have long had porous boundaries with powerful elements in society. In addition, in postcolonial countries like India, with an inherited colonial tradition of divide and rule, governments often escape their own responsibility for conflict by externalizing it as a contradiction within civil society.'

Boys' participation in these groups and episodes of violence also helps establish certain ideal masculinities which include, *inter alia*, a particular understanding of communal difference, of a specifically masculine capacity for aggression and specific views around gender roles and relations. Following excerpts from an interview with Bunty (OBC), Dilip (SC), Dilshad (OBC), Pradeep (UC) and Vikram (UC) bring out some of the boys' views around gender images and roles:

Reva: So, now tell me, whether according to you girls should be allowed to work outside or not. And whether you say 'yes' or 'no' give me reasons.

Bunty, Dilshad (together): According to us, [one] shouldn't send [girls out for work].

Pradeep: Shouldn't send.

Dilip: According to us, [families] should send.

Reva: Speak in turns, one by one!

Bunty: These days the environment is not nice [for girls].

In the following conversation with Pradeep, Vikram and Bunty at Pradeep's house I discussed girls' inclusion in their *mitra-mandals*. During that conversation two or three of Pradeep's neighbours came to see him and standing at the former's doorstep, joined in our conversation:

Pradeep: We just slap the girls and send them back! / Our guys are not nice. (Bunty and Vikram agreed with Pradeep.)

[...]

Reva: So you cannot control the boys?

Bunty: We cannot.

Vikram: [They] are all older than us.

Pradeep: We do but not that much.

Another boy standing with us: [The other boys] argue with us.

[...]

Pradeep: Won't do anything in our presence [but will misbehave behind our backs].

Pradeep did not mean that they actually hit girls trying to join their group, but I find the symbolic expression significant as it implies force. Clearly, girls, not boys will be asked to act differently; specifically, this 'difference' entails a certain kind of gendered exclusion of girls from the public realm. There were also boys like Dilshad who participated neither in such groups, nor in any kind of violence in or beyond the classroom, but had similar opinions to Pradeep's and Bunty's. Yet, conversations excerpted above suggest that alongside discourses within families and classrooms, local political and cultural discourses also impinge upon students' understandings of gender relations and roles in contemporary urban contexts. As such, boys' political and cultural experience bears closer scrutiny. I also consider this an important aspect of boys' lives because of the significance they attached to it; those leading the group, like Pradeep, also seemed to have more important roles in this arena than they did in other institutions, like the school.

4.3.3.2 Negotiating life in the neighbourhood: gender, class and contestation

The pervious subsection brought out the way membership of local groups could shape ideas about religious or gender differences, or encourage certain moral sensibilities leading to vigilantism. I now turn to examples of how individual boys negotiate these ideas and sensibilities; they do so in a range of ways and also display an understanding of constraints on their or their peers' ability to negotiate. For example, boys may indulge in certain kinds of behaviour because they do not (perceive themselves to) have an option. Once when Mahesh (OBC) and I were alone he explained to me why Namit (SC) could not really question his group-mates' decisions:

Mahesh: If I tell Namit [to stop] what will Namit say? Namit is...he himself is afraid, with them... because all these people in Namit's group *na*, they are not his height. [...they are] bigger than him.

Reva: So if they beat him up, he will be in bad shape?

Mahesh: Exactly!

Reva: So he cannot say 'no' to them... Why did he join them?

Mahesh: He lives in the colony from beginning... If he lives in the colony...

Reva: If he lives in the colony he has to be [in the group].

Mahesh: Yeah.

Reva: Meaning that if he doesn't then he will be trapped.

Mahesh: If he isn't [in the group] he will be alone (*akela pad jayega*). Then if something happens he will be on his own.

At times, Mahesh also sought to subvert Namit's ideas of "masculinity" and gender relations. For example, during one conversation between me, Mahesh and Namit Mahesh challenged Namit over what was more "immoral": Mahesh's having a girl-friend or Namit's beating someone up badly. While Namit invested serious effort in body-building and jeered at Mahesh's inability to even fight off boys smaller than him, Mahesh was clear that it is beating someone up that is "bestly behaviour" (*haivaniyat*). Mahesh had initially been part of a neighbourhood group himself but a particularly violent fight had made him think and his parents had also prohibited him from getting involved (according to Mahesh, Namit's parents did not know about the latter's activities).

Similarly, I suggest that Pradeep's decision to name his group, 'Happy Group', can be seen as an effort to project the group as secular. Given the overtly Hindu religious names of their partner groups as well as the overall right-wing Hindu atmosphere of the city Pradeep's decision can be seen as an attempt to subvert this dominant narrative. As previous excerpts (p. 132) show, Pradeep also actively offered protection to his Dalit (Dilip) and Muslim (Dilshad) friends refusing the larger narratives of caste hierarchies and Hindu-Muslim conflict. In addition, I see the English nomenclature as an aspirational move for an IWC boy; the English name was also perhaps to be seen as evidence of his educational accomplishment. Though participation in such neighbourhood groups was a specifically IWC phenomenon in Indore, the choices made by boys could also represent desire for upward mobility

and specifically class-based status (since knowledge of English is widely understood as a symbol of middle class status particularly, in Hindi belt states in India).

Thus, an investigation of IWC boys' political and cultural participation offers insights into another dimension of their experience that could be significantly shaping their understanding of genderclaste and communal relations in contemporary urban India. Engaging with these insights could help better understand social relations and/or to intervene in discourses of gender or religion-based "othering" in the classroom. Most importantly, a grasp of how students negotiate difference and social hierarchies outside the classroom can open up possibilities for democratizing social relations in the classroom.

Lastly, I also see these relationships and boys' gendered and classed efforts to participate in complex local political and cultural networks as evidence of tremendous emotional and intellectual ability on their part. Pradeep mentioned in an interview how impressed his father was with Pradeep's political network and recognition Pradeep received from local politicians. Their family had moved from Damoh only a few years' back; Pradeep's father worked in a unit for spraying and painting steel/iron cupboards and did not have Pradeep's network. The ability to mobilise such social and political networks was important for IWC families' survival because, as boys from both dominant and non-dominant caste groups told me, they needed help from local politicians to address everyday issues like free Bus Passes or problems with water or electricity supply. Thus, many IWC boys, across caste groups, needed to negotiate social relations and networks in *gendered* ways in order to support their families. As I argued earlier, my findings compelled me to organise this chapter on the basis of gender and my discussion of girls' and boys' respective lives in and outside the home shows that for IWC children wider class and gender relations intersected in specific and significant ways shaping, among other things, their subjectivities as well as their participation in formal education.

The gendered skills and abilities IWC children learn to develop are not rewarded or valued at school, and as such, are not perceived to have high status. However, the Rancièorean thesis of equality allows us to see IWC boys' efforts to understand, negotiate and appropriate local political and cultural networks as evidence of

intellectual ability and equality. Their participation may also earn them recognition and status that their relative poverty and marginalisation as IWC individuals tend to undermine. Similarly, girls needed to invest tremendous effort in order to tackle the demands of school and home as well as wage labour. In this sense, IWC pupils' efforts also reflect a willingness and ability to chart out their own paths to survive and succeed both socioeconomically and educationally. I see these efforts as challenging the 'pedagogic myth' of hierarchies of intelligence. Assuming these abilities to be equal to any other abilities, particularly those valued at school, offers as a new way of reimagining the purpose and practice of school education.

In addition, their cultural and political participation offers insights into what is meaningful to IWC boys and why: specifically, their relationship with the communities they are part of, and their efforts to belong and create public identities. Equally important, even though it sometimes entails absence from school this participation is not resistance to school: my data shows that these boys take school work with them on their jobs, actively seek advice on career options and respect both teachers and the institution of school. Appreciating their willingness to invest greater personal and emotional effort in school processes could be a way to create a very different and much better pedagogic experience for them; which a narrow focus on an irrelevant and low quality academic curriculum fails to do. However, such a transformation would also involve a view of these students as (intellectual) equals (Rancière 1991); that is, an assumption of equality as the point of beginning (ibid; Bingham and Biesta 2010). If these students can develop such resourcefulness and so many skills in order to survive and *without systematic instruction* then there is every reason to believe that given adequate resources, time and encouragement they can learn anything they put their minds to. This is an argument which I will keep revisiting in this thesis.

4.4 Shifting systems of gender, class and work

While IWC girls like Radha and Payal end up having to slog at home IWC boys like Prakash have to work hard outside. The difference is that boys' work is more visible

and is appreciated and rewarded (he is paid) whereas domestic work tends to be rendered less visible (partly due to the lack of wages) and thus less worthy of appreciation.

Secondly, boys' conversations revealed that since their work was outside the home and involved a much larger number of people (owners, customers, co-workers) it offered greater variety and interest. Usually they had some freedom to speak and move as they liked and learnt skills that were unavailable at home and school. At least, most IWC boys (Dilip being a notable exception) spoke of their work with an enthusiasm which was completely missing in girls' voices. I suggest that the very fact of being paid for one's labour makes it more worthwhile. In complete contradiction, almost every IWC girl, except Geeta⁵⁵, who spoke of domestic responsibilities spoke of these with resentment, frustration and/or annoyance and spoke of wishing to escape these responsibilities. Thirdly, far from being rewarded, IWC girls almost invariably spoke of being scolded or hit when they made mistakes whereas the IWC boys I questioned about treatment at work, spoke of owner-proprietors treating them kindly even when the boys made mistakes.

It is the biologically deterministic association of home and hearth with a woman that leads to there being the expectation that all girls will learn it at an early age. It is precisely the everyday nature of domestic work that makes it seem unremarkable and the reason why skills and energy required for it are discounted. This is a fundamental problem with a sexual division of labour: the refusal to acknowledge the 'non-wage labour of women' (Mies 2014: 48) and that it enables 'productive' or wage labour (of men, women and children in the global informal economy in this instance; *ibid*). Mies (*ibid*: 49) also points out that this sexual division of labour needs to be viewed not as 'a problem related to family only, but rather as a structural problem of a whole society.'

⁵⁵ Geeta's family had several problems. Her parents had several health issues and her mother and older sister worked as domestic workers. So did Geeta. However, Geeta spoke of her lot in life, and of women's, in general, without rancour, if not with pleasure. She displayed a remarkable serenity and was the only girl who did not complain about the amount of domestic work she had to do every day, at her own and others' houses.

However, it is important to recognise the ways in which both economics and patriarchal family structures have been shifting in the wake of globalisation and neoliberalism, particularly, in the “third world”. Today informal economies, and informal spheres more generally, ‘underwrite’ the global formal ones (Nagar et al. 2002: 260) and in these informal spheres it is the women and children (both boys and girls in a range of capacities) of third world nations that take up the slack where both global capital (as employer) and the neoliberal state have withdrawn from their respective responsibilities, namely, fair working conditions and welfare. Basically, internal migration and particular ways of being incorporated into the global informal economy have paved the way for further entrenching of what Mies (2014) calls the bourgeois family model with its ‘domestication’ and ‘housewifization’ of women. According to Vasavi and Kingfisher (2003: 16), the way all members of the family then struggle and find ways to ensure survival of the family ‘is indicative of the ways in which states shift costs from the paid, formal economy to that of the unpaid informal economy (Moser 1993).’ It is these struggles for survival that see children of these families working (wage and non-wage labour), studying and seeking to insert themselves in local political networks all at the same time.

Thus, in contemporary India economic shifts entail large-scale social shifts which have significance for everyday organisation of family life as well as distribution of wage and non-wage work. Given the reliance of formal spheres on informal ones (Nagar et al. 2002) Mies’ (2014) argument linking family life with global production relations remains true for these evolving economic and family systems as well: ‘The hierarchical division of labour between men and women and its dynamics form an integral part of the dominant production relations, that is, the class relations of a particular epoch and society, and of the broader national and international divisions of labour.’

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have taken an in-depth look at certain aspects of the everyday life of children in the classroom I researched with the aim of challenging the normative

notion of “childhood” that underpins education practice and policy. In the process I have unpacked the larger socioeconomic and political processes and genderclaste relations which shape and limit children’s experiences at home, work and in the neighbourhood. I have shown that children are responsible, productive and capable in both family and work contexts. In fact, it is precisely these attributes that (inter)national production relations have tapped into and which also ensure the survival of the informal working class family. Thus, I have offered a preliminary but systematic analysis of gender, social class and education which captures the shifts taking place in both family structures and wider economic relations.

I have shown how migration enables access to, and continuation of, education for girls and offers women an escape from oppressive marital households. It emerges in this analysis that caste-based social and political capital shapes families’ ability to find work in cities: upper caste men may be able to access better jobs than Dalit men. However, a family’s financial condition and the time parents have spent in the city have a greater impact than caste on attitudes to girls’ freedom and education; and girls, fully cognisant of the freedoms they will miss in smaller town or villages, do not wish to go back to their native villages. Families struggling financially find it harder to have stable lives and break free of the more oppressive social conventions and also require sons to quit school and help the family survive. All of these nuances of the experience of migration and precarity imply that teachers and administrators need to understand precarity and its impact on children and families. This impact can take any of the following forms: low motivation to study, lack of energy and time to study, exhaustion and ill-health, being forced to quit school and/or start work.

In addition, both policymakers and teachers need to understand the gendered nature of the experience of poverty and labour. As I have shown, this gendered experience makes school a rare and important cultural and social space for girls. Thus it becomes problematic if classroom texts and practices reinforce the very restrictions and discriminations against which girls are already struggling at home. Instead, as I will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6 India’s stratified school system offers these girls the least that it can.

With its focus on boys' life this chapter also helps argue the need for teachers, administrators and textbook writers to rethink their engagement with boys from the informal working class. Despite the patriarchal and masculinist biases in classroom texts, in some ways, these texts show as little understanding of IWC boys' life (for example, their ability to care) as they do of girls'. The idea of a range of masculinities and boys' contestation of dominant gender images become important in this context. Classroom discourses also need to create space to engage with boys like Dilip who respects girls' rights and desires or Mahesh, who questions violent hegemonic masculinities. I have also shown the dangers and rewards of particular kinds of moral, public and masculinist discourses boys participate in. I will discuss morality, gender and religious nationalism in greater depth in Chapter 6.

This chapter was an attempt to bring out both the deprivation that children experience and the ability they demonstrate to survive despite these deprivations; both of which teachers, administrators, policy makers and textbook writers deny. This denial of children's life, in other words, is institutionalised. So is the refusal to rethink education with reference to these children's lives. I do not mean to romanticise or glamorise the state of being impoverished through tales of heroic survival, rather, to highlight the richness, complexity and stimulation of their everyday life as opposed to the drab, dull, undemanding (except in the most basic and narrow sense) curricular and pedagogic logics that inform formal education.

As Vasanta (2004: 17) reminds us,

'Instead of urging the children of the poor to acquire the symbols of childhood that are central to modernity, we should try and expose the representations that negate what is valuable in their lives (Nieuwenhuys 1999a).'

Thus, this chapter offers a detailed picture of IWC students' lives beyond school; that is, the overall social, cultural, economic and political context within which their experience of formal education is embedded. On the basis of snapshots of children's lives offered in this chapter, I develop critical analyses of various aspects of schooling, namely, pedagogy, moral curriculum and the 'official knowledge' (Apple 2014) of school in the rest of this thesis. This chapter helps see the distance between

the ideal subject of educational policy and practice and IWC children's specific realities in the next three chapters.

Chapter 5

Negotiating pedagogic processes and relations: '*Sarkari bacche*' in a '*sarkari school*'

'*Sarkari*' is the adjectival form of the Hindi word, '*sarkar*', that is, 'government'. Thus, a *sarkari* school is a government school. '*Bacche*' is the Hindi word for 'children'. The Head Master of the school had christened the children attending the school, '*sarkari bacche*', as a means of referring to the irresponsibility, inefficiency and unreliability that he thought characterised their approach to school and studies because these attributes are widely understood to characterise all state or bureaucratic processes, that is, *sarkari* work. It is in this discursive context that I turn to IWC students' experiences of teaching-learning processes in this chapter. In the last chapter I looked at their lives outside school in order to understand the kinds of childhood they experience and outlined some of the implications of these experiences for their schooling. In the remaining data chapters (chapters 5, 6 and 7) I look at some of the important aspects of children's classroom experiences. Together, the four empirical chapters show how genderclaste relations are (re)produced in and through formal education in the urban Indian context. In this chapter, based on classroom observations and student and parent interviews, I analyse pedagogic texts and practices in the classroom as well as the impact of inadequate infrastructure on pedagogic processes, particularly in view of students' specific socioeconomic circumstances. Interrogating pedagogic texts and practices helps understand how teaching-learning processes and social relations between students and teachers shape students' educational success and failure, thus (re)producing particular claste relations in and through education.

In the Indian sociology of education there have been studies of schools and comparisons between schools catering for different social classes. For example, Velaskar (1990) mentions work by Velaskar and Chitnis (1988), Patel (1987), Britto (1983); Suma Chitnis' surveys in the 1970s also produced useful reports on infrastructure and teacher attitudes (Nambissan and Rao 2013). However, these were surveys rather than classroom studies of social relations and practices. There

is hardly any systematic literature on classroom processes, much less on their implications for (re)production of gendercaste relations between students and teachers (ibid, Nambissan 2004), especially focussing on urban schools. As Kamat (2015) notes, there are also national and international reports that count the number of schools with separate toilets, blackboards and so on, but these are usually descriptions of the dismal condition of government schools and often advocate privatisation. In contrast, as mentioned in chapter 1, I aim to further debates on educational exclusion and argue for strengthening public-funded education in India.

In this chapter I discuss the process of teaching and learning, teachers' views of students' ability and motivation, students' concerns and their efforts and engagement in the classroom as well as parents' efforts to ensure their children's success at school. Through a discussion of findings around these themes I show how inadequate infrastructure and teachers' caste practices influence teaching-learning processes and (re)produce certain relationships between marginalised pupils and formal education. As mentioned in chapter 2, I deploy the deficit model (Lipman 1998, Wesley 1977) to systematically theorise the power relations at stake in everyday pedagogic practices, especially with reference to caste relations in wider Indian society. Lisa Delpit's insights into cultural difference and its ramifications for classroom experience of working class and Black students also inform my analysis. Most importantly, my analysis of students' experiences and teaching-learning practices draws upon Ranciere's notion of 'stultification' (Ranciere 1991) and his 'thesis of equality' (Bingham and Biesta 2010).

In the findings discussed in this chapter gender emerged as a less significant analytical category overall, compared to class and caste. The primary concern in this chapter is teachers' view of students' ability and engagement with their studies and students' efforts to survive and succeed at school; I did not find that teachers' views or expectations were significantly shaped by a student's gender. Gender was not a factor in the attention paid by teachers to students either. For the purposes of this chapter, the most relevant way in which gender relations and patriarchal logics shaped students' experiences was teachers' inability to fully understand girls' constraints and experiences beyond the classroom; I offer an in-depth discussions of this aspect in the chapter. At school, success is defined narrowly in terms of

performance in exams and classrooms; what is acknowledged and rewarded is the set of skills and knowledges that leads to educational success and upward mobility within the existing framework. However, the existing definition of “success” and “failure” fails to capture the ability of students from non-dominant castes and/or IWC groups to learn and improve in a range of ways; such a framework also fails to allow for different paces of learning. As I show, the binary of mental and physical labour that organises curriculum and pedagogy in formal education is centrally responsible for these definitions. This binary is also a reflection of historical logics of caste-based hierarchies, division of labour and marginalisation as well as the institutionalisation of these logics in and through formal education in India. I also offer my reading of students’ political agency and subjectivation (Pelletier 2009, Simons and Masschelein 2010) which, as I argue in chapter 8, is vital for reimagining practice in the specific context engaged in this thesis.

5.1 School routine, infrastructure and activities

In this section I add to the description of the school that I offered in chapter 3 in order to illuminate aspects of infrastructure, school routine and the range of activities at the school that impinged upon teaching-learning processes. Except the playground, there were no available spaces for non-academic activities. A low table whose top measured about a square metre in area, had been placed in the Staff Room and served as the “library” for the school. On occasion, a computer and an additional table placed in the Class VII classroom were used to transform the classroom into a “Smart Class”⁵⁶. There was a concrete dais in the courtyard that served as an open-air stage during special occasions like India’s Republic Day (26 January). In the Staff Room there were three wooden tables for the six teachers to share and some smaller, shakier tables and some trunks and a couple of small

⁵⁶ The Smart Class was a concept rather than a separate room. The concept was that computers and digital media be used for teaching mathematical concepts. A computer had been bought for the Middle School and was stored in one of the classrooms. It was used twice in my presence between September 2014 and March 2015.

cupboards for storing important documents and attendance and stock registers. The Head Master had a separate desk for his use in the same room and there was a table in one corner on which sat a computer and a printer donated by a local bank. There was neither a landline phone nor an internet connection even though the Head Master had to regularly download a number of official documents from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra⁵⁷ website. Moreover, other than Ganga Bai, who was the Midday Meal Helper and whose daughter also studied in the classroom I researched, there were no other support staff. Thus, in addition to their academic work the Head Master and teachers had to take care of every aspect of administrative work as well. Ganga Bai was employed on a casual contract and paid a meagre INR 500 per month; in addition to helping serve the midday meal and cleaning up afterwards, she sometimes cleaned corridors and classrooms washed up after important school functions.

When I first began fieldwork the school timings were 7.15 AM to 12.30 PM with each period being forty-five minutes long; the morning assembly used to take up fifteen minutes and the lunchbreak, half an hour. The morning assembly consisted of a school prayer, a *Saraswati Vandana*⁵⁸ and the National Anthem; sometimes teachers or the Head Master also made announcements regarding important events, or instructed students on correct behaviour. The assembly was usually lead by some of the “good” students, that is, students who scored well in exams and were considered responsible, obedient and orderly by teachers. The rest of the day was divided into six slots, one for each of the six subjects and the lunch break in the middle of the day. The time-table remained the same throughout the six-day week. There were no slots for non-academic activities; however, school-wide, day-long cultural and sports activities were organised once or twice every year and were eagerly anticipated by the students. In December 2014, pursuant to orders from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra,

⁵⁷ The Rajya Shiksha Kendra was the highest body overseeing state government and local body schools in Madhya Pradesh. For further details, see chapter 1.

⁵⁸ Saraswati is the Hindu goddess for knowledge and learning. *Saraswati Vandana* is a prayer offered to the goddess. This is a practice across state government run schools in the state.

school timings were changed to 10.30 AM to 4.30 PM and each class was now about an hour long.

Till the academic year 2013-2014, the cohort I researched had been divided into two separate classrooms: one for the boys and the other, for the girls. M L Vishwakarma had been the Class Teacher for the boys' section and Prabha Shinde for the girls' section. At the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year, the two sections had been combined to form a single classroom though two separate Attendance Registers continued to be maintained and all the administrative work for each former section was still the responsibility of the respective former Class Teachers. However, according to Prabha Shinde, she had to do most of the work for both sections as M L Vishwakarma was often away⁵⁹.

The first class, every day, was Sanskrit, the second was Social Studies and the third, Mathematics. Post lunch, first period was Science which was followed by English. The day ended with Hindi class.⁶⁰ Since the Social Studies teacher, M L Vishwakarma, had often been away, the HM used to ask Preeti Mali to take the Social Studies class while he himself taught Mathematics. Apart from the morning assembly, school mornings were punctuated by anniversary celebrations of important former leaders and historical figures such as Vallabh Bhai Patel, Din Dayal Upadhyay and Devi Ahilya Bai. These celebrations usually entailed a longer morning assembly where teachers, the HM, or selected students from the Middle School gave speeches and some students sang songs (these were usually *impromptu* performances and the same handful of students in the school sang on every occasion). Every year there was also a day of sports toward the end of the year. The event was called, 'Gathering', and included activities like rope skipping and different kinds of races in which girls and boys usually competed amongst themselves

⁵⁹ He was the Block level officer (BLO) and had other responsibilities related to updating voter lists and helping new voters register, among other things.

⁶⁰ This schedule changed a bit with the longer school timings and change in the availability of teachers in December 2014. Two of the teachers had to go for frequent training for invigilation as the school had been declared an examination centre for Class X State Board Examinations. Another two teachers had been assigned electoral responsibilities for the State Assembly elections to be held in January 2015.

(sometimes the girl and boy winner also competed in a kind of final round). As there were no sports periods in the school day, or any sports equipment, there was no possibility for either other kinds of sports or any preparation for a sports event. The academic year during which I did my fieldwork, students “practiced” during the morning and the ‘Gathering’ took place in the afternoon. Children’s Day (celebrated on 14 November every year, to mark the birth anniversary of independent India’s first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru) and the ‘Farewell’ (*Vidai samaroh*) of Class VIII students were the other important events which broke the monotony of the school routine. These were day-long celebrations and students were allowed to wear “civil” dress as opposed to the school-uniform; this meant that many girls wore elaborate hair dos and makeup which earned them the disapproval of many of their teachers.

In addition to regular classes, examinations were the other important academic activity. Monthly tests that were held between July and February had replaced the earlier system of three-monthly, half-yearly and annual examinations since 2010-2011 as part of continuous and comprehensive evaluation introduced under the RTE 2009. Annual examinations were held in March and most importantly, there was the *Pratibha Parv*⁶¹(Talent Fest); the latter was an annual state-wide examination (till 2014-2015 this was a day-long event) offered in a multiple-choice format. It had been introduced in 2011-2012 and tested students on all six subjects as well as evaluating school facilities and students’ project files and “fair”⁶² notebooks.

Thus, there was little time or space for non-academic activities, unlike in many other categories of private and government schools (for example, Kendriya or Navodaya

⁶¹ The *Pratibha Parv* and its implications are discussed in detail in chapter 7 of the thesis.

⁶² “Fair” notebooks as opposed to notebooks used for “rough” work in the classroom. Notebooks are called ‘copies’ in India. Fair copies are the ones that will be corrected by teachers and showed to various school inspectors and used for evaluation of students and also evaluation of the school during *Pratibha Parv*. It is another example of the stress on presentation. These notebooks had to be “corrected” by respective subject teachers to ensure that all the answers copied into the notebook were correct. Head Master had to sign the corrected copied as an exercise in monitoring teachers’ work.

Vidyalayas⁶³). Nor was there sufficient infrastructure to support academic, administrative or extra-curricular activities. This made school life difficult and dreary for both students and teachers; as conversations with teachers and pupils revealed, it also affected all round levels of motivation in the school.

5.2 Teaching and learning

5.2.1 Memorisation: the central plank of teaching-learning

It is widely understood that in most Indian schools knowledge is reduced to “facts” in the textbook⁶⁴ which is central to classroom teaching and learning (Kumar 1988, Sarangapani 2003). Unless otherwise specified, in this chapter I use the term, ‘teaching’, in the narrow sense in which teachers and students used it: doing lessons from prescribed textbooks. It is also well established that rote, memorisation and individual or whole-class recitation are the primary methods of teaching and learning in Indian schools irrespective of the subject area under discussion (Balagopalan and Subramanian 2002; Jeffery et al. 2004; Kumar 1989; Manjrekar 2007; NCERT 2006; Page 2005; Ramachandran 2004; Sarangapani 2003, 2014; Sriprakash 2012, Velaskar 1990). The structure and process of teaching and learning are rooted in the idea of memorisation⁶⁵. All the main pedagogic processes – teaching, student-teacher interaction and examinations – expect and demand memorisation. Lastly, with the large class-sizes found in this category of schools many other pedagogic approaches would also be difficult to implement. As mentioned in chapter 3, this classroom had seventy-nine students on the roll when I began fieldwork; on average, fifty to sixty kids out of seventy-nine attended school every day.

⁶³ See chapter 1 for description of categories of schools.

⁶⁴ Textbooks discussed in chapter 7.

⁶⁵ While Sarangapani (2003) has, on the basis of her student participants’ responses, differentiated between rote (*ratana* in Hindi) and memorisation (*yaad karna* in Hindi) my focus was not on students’ construction of knowledge, but on teachers’ view of teaching and learning and teacher always used the words, ‘*yaad karna*’, i.e., memorisation.

The following extracts are examples of teachers' instructions and expectations regarding memorisation (fieldnotes on classroom teaching-learning in October and November 2014):

(Science lesson) Usha Pandey remarked to me that these children have no inclination to memorise. (16/09/2014)

(English lesson) English takes a lot of effort and time: [students] often write English stuff in Hindi, then its meaning, and then memorise. Jyoti Gupta asked everyone to memorise spellings – [kids] seemed to be doing it too. The teacher called Nilofar⁶⁶ to the front of the class and asked the girl to spell words she gave her. Jyoti Gupta threatened pupils with beatings... [she was] insisting that they memorise word meanings. She said, 'I can see if you have just copied it from someone or tried writing it on your own. You can barely remember one spelling and you want me to believe that you can remember entire answers!' (09/10/2014)

The way lessons were organised is as follows: teachers read out segments from the textbook, or asked students to read paragraphs out aloud. This could be a girl or a boy and could include a "good" or "weak" student (it was the average, non-disruptive student who was deprived of teachers' attention). Teachers then explained the meaning of that segment and moved on. At the end of the lesson teachers did all the exercises; this usually entailed dictating answers to the questions in the textbook, or writing the answers on the blackboard and exhorting students to copy these. Some teachers made students mark answers in the textbook and expected the questions and answers to be copied into 'fair' notebooks. When the administrative workload was very high, particularly toward the end of the academic year, Prabha Shinde – who had to do M L Vishwakarma's administrative work as well – often asked one of the "star" pupils, Bushra (Muslim, OBC), Dilip (SC) or Nilofar (Muslim, OBC), to copy answers from a guide⁶⁷ on to the blackboard so the rest of the students could jot the answers down in their notebooks. Then, as Sarangapani (2003) has also noted, students were constantly instructed to memorise all the answers. As I jotted down in my field notebook one day at school:

⁶⁶ Muslim, OBC girl.

⁶⁷ Guides or *kunjis* (literally, 'keys') are books that offer summaries of lessons and answers to the questions in school textbooks. These are available for all levels of education and all kinds of syllabi in Indian markets.

Most kids are thoroughly bored in class. They are expected to be too passive, no activity's required. They can't speak, can't move and are not encouraged to think about connections or ideas. They've tremendous intellect and ability. But it's not used in [classroom teaching-learning]. Teacher reads and explains.... No new information, visuals, discussions. (10/01/2015)

It is important to remember that India missed the curricular and pedagogic revolutions sweeping the West at the end of the last century and thus India's pedagogic processes remain embedded in Bloom's behaviourist approach (Sarangapani 2014). The above fieldnote also shows that no other way of learning was enabled or allowed in the classroom: there was no additional reading material, no writing practice or creative writing and no structured opportunities or encouragement for students to discuss concepts with each other. *Everyone was expected to learn in the same way and usually at the same pace*: memorise meanings of words and answers to all the textbook questions and 'completing' all their copies. While reproduction and rote are dominant approaches in other kinds of schools as well, state schools are particularly starved of resources thus limiting possible pedagogic strategies.

The insistence on memorisation of answers dictated by teachers and based on information in textbooks is an example of the 'subordination' of one person's intelligence to another that Ranciere (1991) terms 'stultification'. Memorisation itself need not be stultifying but the idea that everyone should learn everything the same way and based on another's explanation of what the 'right answer' (Sarangapani 2003) is, is stultifying because it does not allow students to find their own ways and pace of learning. According to Ranciere, the typical relationship between a 'master' and her students is that of 'intelligence to intelligence' rather than that of 'will to will'. Instead, if the teacher is only 'a will that sets the ignorant person down a path, that is to say to instigate a capacity already possessed...' (ibid: 2-3) then students can grapple on their own with concepts and texts to develop their understanding. What actually happens is that 'the explicative order' (ibid: 4) and resulting pedagogic practice succeed in 'divid[ing] intelligence into two. It says that there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one.' This can be seen in the following extract from an interview with Dilip (SC), Arif (Muslim, OBC), Rahul Subhash (SC) and Mahesh (OBC). When I asked why completing copies was useful, the boys listed a

number of reasons: it helped them memorise answers and get marks for completing work and good handwriting. Our subsequent conversation ran thus:

Reva: Then why are you so mad about getting every word every sentence right? That madam should tell you exactly what to write? You don't trust your brains?

Arif (clearly and deliberately): No.

Dilip: Even if [it is] correct *na*, only when we see someone else's answer we can think that ours is right (everyone laughed)... [We] have very little trust in ourselves!

I now turn to some of the socioeconomic factors behind students' differential ability to memorise. Hindi is the medium of education in Madhya Pradesh state schools but students' ability to read, speak and write Hindi varied in this classroom. I found caste to be a factor in students' ability to use standard Hindi. Standard Hindi is the formal Hindi used in official documents and textbooks. In this classroom, irrespective of the financial condition of families, students from non-dominant castes tended to speak in shorter sentences and use non-standard pronunciations and colloquial forms. On the other hand, upper-caste students, irrespective of individual families' financial conditions, tended to speak in longer sentences, use standard pronunciations and sentence structures and were more comfortable with spoken standard Hindi. Most (not all) students from non-dominant castes, even those who could read more fluently than upper-caste students, tended to speak differently. I suggest that these differences are a reflection of the larger, caste-based networks that different families are part of. Since upper-caste communities have traditionally had better access to education and other culturally dominant resources upper-caste students are more comfortable speaking in the standard, formal Hindi required at school. Further, for the same student, abilities to read, write and speak Hindi could differ.

Irrespective of caste-based differences, most students struggled with the more literary, Sanskritised Hindi of Science, Social Science and Mathematics textbooks; the only ones who seemed to manage it without substantial effort were the "star" students who had regularly accessed private coaching. While caste-based familiarity with the school language may be an advantage, given the nature of classroom teaching-learning, private coaching is needed to ensure success at school. Sanskrit has historically been the language of Hindu rituals and scriptures and most "lower"

castes were denied access to it (Chakravarti 2009a).⁶⁸ During the 19th and 20th centuries Sanskrit came to systematically influence Hindi used for official, including educational purposes, for a range of reasons (Kumar 2013). This Sanskritised Hindi continues to be the main language used in official documents, textbooks and many teachers' speech in schools in Madhya Pradesh; and it is this Hindi that students must use when answering questions in the classroom or during examinations.

Making memorisation the only way to learn and succeed at school tends to reproduce educational disadvantage for another reason, particularly, in the context of IWC families belonging to non-dominant caste groups. The parents of most of the IWC students in this classroom had had little or no school education; while these parents wished for educational success for their children (to a large extent, for both girls and boys) they were often unable to monitor and support their children's education in ways rewarded and required at school. Specifically, such parents often could not help their children memorise the content of textbooks. Secondly, the history of caste-based marginalisation, especially, exclusion from education (Kumar 2013, Nambissan 1996) has also made it tremendously difficult for many parents from non-dominant castes to directly help their children learn. However, as I discuss shortly in this chapter, none of these historical or contemporary narratives of educational injustice stop parents from working for their children's educational success.

Lastly, expecting all students to learn by memorisation (alone) acts as an objectifying practice that constrains students in two ways: one, they must all learn using the same technique and two, they cannot rely on their ability to find answers or write in their own words. Moreover, this pedagogic 'discipline' also entails physical and verbal

⁶⁸ Interestingly, I found that there were differences in the language of worship as well. While upper caste students, like Shweta, reported reciting Sanskrit verses as part of their religious rituals, non-dominant groups (both OBC and SC), seem to rely more on devotional songs written/sung in vernacular and colloquial Hindi. Schools did have space for the latter to be sung during school functions, but textbooks, classroom teaching and examinations only valued knowledge of standard, formal Hindi. Differences in religious practices (deities, rituals and languages), patterns of language use and their implications for experiences of schooling need to be more systematically researched and analysed in the context of IWC students who are also internal migrants.

aggression. I suggest that the degree of physical and verbal aggression can be especially high in this category of schools because of the caste distance between students and teachers; as I show in another section in this chapter teachers' views of students are often informed by the former's perception of sociocultural hierarchies. Sriprakash (2012: 91) also found that teachers use their pupil's social class locations (manifested, for instance, in parents' level of education) as a basis for evaluating pupils' and parents' ability, motivation and 'intelligence'.

5.2.2 Differences among teachers: approaches to teaching and students

Though rote learning and textbook centrism (Kumar 1988, Sarangapani 2003) rule the classroom, teachers' knowledge of subjects they taught, their approach to teaching and their relationship with students varied. Students' views of teachers also reflected this diversity in approaches and relationships. Firstly, as I show in this section, the men, Pramod Bhargav and M L Vishwakarma, worked far less hard in the classroom than the women; while Pramod Bhargav, at least, went to the classroom regularly, M L Vishwakarma rarely stepped into the classroom and when he did, he often physically and verbally abused the students. Secondly, both men hit the students far more regularly than the women did.

Of the three women, Usha Pandey never hit any students and always spoke to them in a dignified manner; Page (2005) found that it makes a difference to students if teachers treat them with respect and show care. Both Jyoti Gupta and Prabha Shinde regularly hit and shamed the students. The women teachers were almost universally preferred over the men teachers, including Manish Tiwari; the primary reason was not (only) that the men hit students more, but that the women did *what they were supposed to do*: they taught, explained lesson content and did all the exercises at the end of lessons. Some girls, like Vaishali (SC), also pointed out that an important difference between Pramod Bhargav and M L Vishwakarma was that the former never raised his hand to a girl, or used abusive language with them. Following fieldnotes show some of the difference between men and women teachers' practices in this classroom:

Bhargav sir correcting copies today. Abhijeet⁶⁹ and another kid asked to bring their mothers so he can complain about the kids' behaviour. Couple of kids hit, and everyone admonished: 'You, animals! You are human beings, live like human beings!' (08 Oct 2014)

Vishwakarma sir is quite aggressive with the children. So is Bhargav sir, often. The women, even Shinde madam, is better.⁷⁰ (09 Oct 2014)

[Vishwakarma sir] hits children a lot – even tried to kick Mayank⁷¹ today. It was so ridiculous a spectacle that it was ineffective. / [The teacher] never located any [place] on a map – or ensured that kids got the location right. / It's a Geography lesson and... Children are really bored, restless and fidgety. He himself keeps saying that Social Studies is for [learning by rote]. He kept going out in the last ten minutes and then stayed out. (15 Oct 2014)

I also observed that neither man taught the textbook content the way the women did. Pramod Bhargav sometimes got students to read and explained from the lessons, but rarely did the exercises. M L Vishwakarma rarely explained lesson content, maps, or the terminology; nor did he do the exercises in the textbook. Pramod Bhargav often began with a lesson and then veered off in arbitrary directions. For example, a lesson on Gandhi in the *Sahayak Vachan* (the Reader prescribed for Hindi) would somehow lead to a lecture on table manners, Or dogs used for detection. Students also found it confusing. While Nilofar (Muslim, OBC) noted in a group interview that '[Bhargav] sir goes off topic often', Pradeep (UC) found Pramod Bhargav's classes 'entertaining'. In an interview in February 2015, after school timings had changed to 10.30 AM to 4.30 PM, Abhijeet (ST) summarised his thoughts thus:

⁶⁹ ST boy.

⁷⁰ While Shinde madam was often very aggressive and irritable in the classroom I also saw her be very kind and patient a few times. For example, one afternoon when Usha Pandey was away, Prabha Shinde was in charge of the students. Since she was free of administrative work and even though Science was not her subject, she actually made students read the current science lesson out aloud, explained meanings of difficult words and showed tremendous patience with Taruna's nervousness at reading aloud. She corrected the girl in a kind fashion and made her re-read the same passage several times. She also always did her own syllabus sincerely and this was stated as the reason by many students who said that they liked Sanskrit teacher; very few listed her among their teachers they disliked.

⁷¹ Upper caste boy.

Abhijeet: Now the periods are one hour long each – and Bhargav sir has been given two periods... Can't figure out whether he's teaching or not, roams around all over the place...

Vijay⁷²: More than half the time, [he] doesn't teach.

Abhijeet: And if someday everyone is making noise, he'll come...then he'll come and stand here, and ask anything, that is, definitions, [he will ask] someone who doesn't remember [or] who is new, he will make that person stand [and answer]...

Students could, of course, see who was just whiling away time and who was making an effort to get things done. Among the women, Jyoti Gupta did not know English, the subject she was expected to teach, at all. However, she brought hand written notes for teaching (that is, meanings of words and answers to all the questions at the end of a lesson), wrote everything on the blackboard and made sure that children copied everything and constantly exhorted them to memorise meanings, spellings, rules of grammar as well as answers to all the questions in the textbook. Prabha Shinde told me she had learnt Sanskrit on the job as she had studied Hindi at undergraduate level, not Sanskrit. She did not make mistakes in the classroom unlike Jyoti Gupta who regularly made mistakes in grammar, pronunciation and spelling. One afternoon, at the end of the year, standing at the doorstep of the classroom, Jyoti Gupta remarked to me that '[after all], English is *another* (*dusri*; implying, foreign) language for 'us' too. We also don't know where to use which form of a verb.'

Usha Pandey stood out in her confidence in her subject, her consistently dignified and non-threatening treatment of students, her efforts to at least transact textbook content (when time permitted she also tried to test students' understanding and help individual students) and get students to complete textbook exercises and her ability to generally guide students in their work. She also had a sense of humour and had enough confidence in her ability to teach and "control" the classroom to allow some leeway for jokes and asides. In the interview excerpted above, Abhijeet (ST) had also spoken about Manish Tiwari and Usha Pandey:

Abhijeet: Like, [Tiwari] sir, like sir, *bade* sir teaches, but sir himself says that if I teach a lot you cannot understand anything. And, like, joking a bit in

⁷² ST boy.

between... Now, like, science teacher, she also makes jokes in the middle [of the class] while she teaches, so...

Reva: So it doesn't feel like a 'load'.

Abhijeet: ...Doesn't feel like a 'load'. Sir himself says when he's taught for too long 'now your brain is too full [to take more]...'

For example, the following exchange, though harmless enough, could not have happened in any other teacher's class without provoking either the teacher's wrath or allowing some student to take things far enough to disrupt the class. It was a week before final examinations and Usha Pandey had asked everyone to write answers to some practice questions on their own. Following are fieldnotes taken during that class:

Usha Pandey went to each kid to check if they had done yesterday's questions, instructing them: 'Do your own work, don't speak to others! Rahul, your voice shouldn't reach me!'

(Since there were three Rahul's in the classroom) Rahul Singh promptly asked: 'Which Rahul's [voice] madam?'

Without missing a beat or taking offence, Usha Pandey replied: 'Rahul...Subhash!' (24/03/2015)⁷³

Even when under her "control" her classrooms had signs of life and activity. In the same class I also jotted down:

There isn't the dead silence that is usually found in Jyoti Gupta's class. Instead there is some little noise – conversations, arguments, students reading aloud as they wrote, sound of students looking for answers in the textbook... alive, not dead. At the same time, there are students like Aalok, who find Science and Hindi [text]books boring. (24/03/2015)

Usha Pandey also tried to make her classes a little more interesting, as the following fieldnote extract shows:

Pandey madam showed refraction: a pencil in a glass of water. (08/10/2014)
However, such attempts backfired when some science laboratory equipment got broken accidentally. Two days after this demonstration and still on the optics lesson (a concept, Usha Pandey told me, students struggled to grasp), she brought a glass slab and a prism to the classroom. Students were excited beyond measure. This was

⁷³ While Rahul Singh was upper caste, Rahul Subhash was from a Dalit/SC community.

a rare occurrence. Even in their neat and orderly rows and quiet fascination, in being passed from one student to another in such a large group, both items got chipped by the time half the students had handled the prism and the slab. Usha Pandey was furious and the students subdued. Mahesh (OBC) even came to me to find out where they could buy prisms and how much these cost. He had wanted to replace the broken items. On the other hand, Pandey madam had felt that it was useless to try out such things in a classroom full of “careless” students.

Still, Usha Pandey was the only teacher to note the inadequacy of the teaching and infrastructure. The lack of hope and imagination of better working conditions and facilities on the part of other teachers in the school could be a symptom of the more general lack of faith in the state government school as an ‘institution’ (Sarangapani 2010). One November afternoon, in the corridor outside the classroom, Usha Pandey spoke about these issues at length (fieldnotes written up immediately after our conversation):

She said there should be a library where they could sit and read. / Children have problems with dictation [and have] no ability to listen and write carefully. She also indicated as she has many times, that Bhargav sir doesn’t do what he should. [So] children cannot read and write Hindi correctly (which is the medium of education)... She said she had recently given them a lecture on ‘handwriting’. / I asked her what she would change if she’d the freedom. If she had the freedom, she said she will cut class size down in half and introduce a library, enough space to sit and read and a librarian. She stressed the fact that not keeping records was also okay. She said, ‘even though I’m only a Science teacher, I feel that we, as teachers, should take care of overall development’ and every aspect of growth. She is also keen on giving kids opportunities to present, learn to talk in public, etc. / She also blamed reports and committees like [the] Yashpal Committee Report: that in the name of reducing the burden of school bags they’ve drastically reduced syllabus and changed exam patterns, but it’s very little and these kids should be doing a lot more.’ (24/11/2014)

She was also the only staff member to say that they were paid well enough so it was only to be expected that they had to work hard for their salaries. The other person who went out of his way to ensure that the students learnt something and improved was the Head Master. Manish Tiwari was not actually assigned any teaching but throughout the year, I saw him going into the Class VIII classroom every opportunity he could find. He also took care of the remedial classes for Mathematics mandated by the state education department as the school only had a Guest Teacher for

Mathematics; Guest Teachers had shorter working hours and were not available till the end of the regular school day when the remedial classes took place. However, following fieldnotes reveal that Manish Tiwari was also largely unable to understand IWC students' life beyond school and how it shaped their participation in schooling:

For Manish Tiwari, only memory and practice are important. He often complains that these kids don't open their books when at home and never bother to memorise. He asked me what I'd learnt, understood about their problems, why they don't study. (03/12/2014)

In response to his frequent questions, I did give Manish Tiwari some general information on financial struggles and lack of support for this kind of learning at home, but he had little understanding of poverty, or empathy for students' and parents' constraints. Despite their own efforts, both Usha Pandey and Manish Tiwari despaired of any improvement in the majority of their students. Based on the fieldnotes excerpted below, I suggest that a reason for students refusing to attempt greater independence was also the refusal of the other four teachers to facilitate independent learning:

Usha Pandey has to force them to open their books and look in it for answers. Problem is, no one else makes them look for answers. At least, those who don't dictate, also do not bother to [explain lesson content] or check whether [students] wrote correct answers. So [children] have been made completely dependent. (03/12/2014)

Pramod Bhargav did not teach, dictate answers, or encourage students to find answers on their own, or write in their own words. He usually distributed 'guides' so students could complete notebooks and avoided having to ensure that they wrote the right answers. His approach was particularly problematic given the fact that most students struggled with the standardised Hindi which was the medium of their education. Jyoti Gupta did not encourage independent thinking and writing because she did not know any English and had to limit students' options to fixed answers so she would know exactly what they had written and whether it was correct. Moreover, in the previous two academic years (when this cohort was respectively in Class VI and Class VII) boys and girls had been in two different sections; according to Pradeep (UC), since the boys' section had been assigned all the men teachers and the girls' section, the "'good" teachers' (which, in this case, was the women), boys had lost out on two years' worth of learning at school. According to Dilip (SC), even

Manish Tiwari, who had taught them Mathematics in Class VI, had not taught the boys anything and had always been very aggressive.

Thus, as I noted earlier, though their overall pedagogic approach remains the same, individual teachers differed in subject knowledge, their efforts to teach the textbook content and attitudes toward pupils. It is important to underscore the fact of this difference because state school teachers are often demonised and held responsible for the state of the school system (Manjrekar 2013); they are also being increasingly closely monitored (Sarangapani 2010). However, the problem as I show in the next section, is not (only) that some teachers do not teach in the classroom but (also) that many have a 'deficit' view (Lipman 1998) of IWC students. Sriprakash (2012) and Pappu and Vasanta (2010) have reported similar findings in the Indian context. I also suggest that it is precisely because state government schools are populated by IWC pupils that such disciplinary and teaching practices go largely unremarked and unaddressed in this category of schools. As discussed in chapter 2, the deficit model allows teachers to lay the blame for 'low academic performance' at the doors of students and families by virtue of their caste locations. Often upper-caste, middle-class teachers' own experiences are completely different; thus, the police logic of caste relations in wider society enables teachers to "other" students in various ways, particularly, through intellectual and moral evaluation of IWC children.

However, it is also important to understand the contradictions and complexities inherent in processes of (re)production in classrooms. Firstly, though school is an institution embedded in larger social relations it is not completely 'determined' by these relations. Secondly, structures of caste or class do not operate solely through individuals' locations. It is important to distinguish the disciplinary logics of the school from the larger social logic; though notions of "good" and "bad" student are inscribed by dominant social relations of caste, class and gender, these notions of "good"/"bad" also open up spaces for students to 'work' the school system to their benefit by appropriating different ways of being in the classroom. For example, the idea of the "good" student in this classroom is shaped by classed and caste notions of "obedience", "orderliness", "hard-work" or the willingness and ability to memorise lessons; however, IWC students from non-dominant castes, like Dilip (SC) or Nilofar (Muslim, OBC), also develop the attributes and practices that are rewarded

at school. Similarly, though upper caste boys benefit from their gender and caste locations, these locations do not ensure benefits in every instance. Upper caste and/or boy-students are also evaluated against the definitions of “good”/“bad” students. This is not to say that there is no need to interrogate the institutionalisation of genderclasted ideals upheld in classrooms, but to point out that genderclaste locations do not directly, or completely, determine students’ experiences in a classroom.

Secondly, it is useful to remember that, in general, disciplinary practices are also developed in an institution because of the imperatives of maintaining some sort of order (a *police* logic); and order requires rules to be framed and implemented, that is, for individuals and practices to be *policed* according to these rules. While the specific rules that emerge in a given institution are shaped by social relations within which the institution is embedded, the fact that there are rules is not, by itself, solely determined by the specific nature of social relations. This is one of the reasons why, despite larger narratives of caste- and class- based marginalisation embedding education policy and practice, not every individual teachers’ practice fits (neatly) into this narrative. For example, Manish Tiwari and Usha Pandey make greater efforts than the other teachers despite the caste difference between the former and their students; while the ideas of “good”/“bad” students mattered, these ideas also operated *independently of actual genderclaste identities of individual students*. Though there are social relations and institutions that have worked historically to disadvantage students from specific caste-class backgrounds, I found that these two teachers encouraged any student making efforts, irrespective of the latter’s genderclaste locations.

At the same time, it is possible that despite similarities of gender, class and/or caste, teachers may not be able or willing to empathise with IWC students who are girls and/or from non-dominant castes. For example, M L Vishwakarma had himself had a difficult childhood and educational experience as an OBC, working class student (his father had been a mill-worker); he also pointed out to me in the one rare conversation we had, that state schools were increasingly being patronised by only the most marginalised of students. Yet, he rarely went to the classroom or taught

and did not seem to have a good relationship with a single child in this Class VIII cohort.

Lastly, deliberate stratification of education has led to systemic issues like lack of resources, large class sizes as well as lack of time and space for non-academic activities in state government schools. Consequently, on the one hand, children are often unable to engage with classroom teaching and on the other hand, even those teachers who care about their students' futures and learning experience are severely constrained in their ability to support the latter.

5.2.3 Teachers' view of parents and students

Almost all teachers frequently and explicitly lamented the perceived lack of support at students' homes. Page (2005) found similar tendencies on the part of teachers to blame the low performance of their students on poorer and "lower" caste parents' lack of care and the atmosphere in homes. One afternoon, when we were standing near the school gate during lunch time, Manish Tiwari once again expressing his puzzlement at what he saw as his students' refusal to study. He expressed his frustration that it was at school that all academic needs had to be taken care of:

'Classwork, getting them to memorise, getting their homework done, our own teaching' since no one will help with homework or memorising [at home]. (26/11/2014)

He would often recount his efforts at getting students to practice solving Mathematics problems – what he did in the class, in the remedial classes and what he asked them to do at home – and express frustration at the lack of results. His view was that students in private schools went for tuition and thus private school teachers needed to do a lot less; whereas parents of students in '*sarkari*' schools did not care what their children did after school. According to him, parents who send their children to private schools (fieldnotes taken after our conversation) think that:

'[If I am] paying thousand [rupees] for school, let me pay another five hundred [rupees] to the tutor as well'. (29/09/2014)

He was implying that his students' parents were not willing to spend on tuition and that is why the students struggled. Moreover, he thought that the willingness to spend and ensure that one's children studied was what distinguished private school

and state school students and their parents. I suggest that part of the reason behind his frustration was also that he expected me to blame government school staff for children's "failure" to learn as countless reports by NGOs and other national and international agencies have done (Manjrekar 2013, Kamat 2015). At the same time, there was definitely a lack of understanding of IWC students' motivation, struggles and efforts to learn, their parents' aspirations and the very real and immediate material constraints. As argued earlier, intergenerational histories of educational and other exclusion is also ignored when teachers assume such lack of motivation on part of the parents and pupils. Thus, Lipman's argument (1998: 82) that '[t]he deficit explanation was rooted in a negative and degrading cultural mode of low-income' families holds true in this case as well. Following extracts from fieldnotes on my conversations with Usha Pandey reflect similar views:

Usha Pandey said, 'You know what, these children are from the labour class; managing [them] is very difficult.' (17/09/2014)

'Didn't our parents send us to school?' Pandey madam said. I was commenting on how many things outside the school need to change for children's school-related issues to be addressed. And Usha Pandey said that whether rich or poor, if parents paid attention from the beginning [of children's schooling] and cared for the kids' education, things worked. Otherwise they didn't. She asked, 'If the child came to school every day, how can they not learn?' (27/01/2015)

It was indeed true that students like Bushra (Muslim, OBC), Nilofar (Muslim, OBC), Sameena (Muslim, Gen), Dilshad (Muslim, OBC) and Arif (Muslim, OBC), who scored better and were universally seen as "star" students in the classroom, attended school regularly and had no, or, little work at home. Since there was a 'no-detention' policy in place⁷⁴ and since students ultimately got letter grades rather than marks I based my definition of 'star student' on whether students consistently scored top grades ('A' or 'B'), were able to answer questions asked by teachers during classroom teaching and accomplished other tasks, like completing project files and classwork and homework notebooks, which contributed towards their final letter-grades. In the case of "star" girl students, their mothers or older sisters did most of the work.

⁷⁴ No student was given letter grade 'F' which was equivalent to failing. Everyone scored between grades 'A' and 'E'. The policy has been discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

All these students could also afford to go for private tuitions and had either lived in Indore or nearby cities all their lives. Private tuition and the experience of negotiating urban contexts, particularly, schools, emerged as more important factors than private schooling at primary level. For example, while Nilofar (Muslim, OBC), Dilshad (Muslim, OBC), Arif (Muslim, OBC) and Bushra (Muslim, OBC) had studied in a local private school till Class V, Sameena (Muslim, Gen) and Uzma (Muslim, Gen) had studied in the same school since Class I. Bindu (OBC), Renuka (OBC), Smita (UC) who also did well in school had spent almost their entire lives in Indore.

Not a single teacher expressed any inclination to examine teaching methods, textbook content or their view of how students learnt. The same method was supposed to work for everyone irrespective of their circumstances, interests, strengths and weaknesses. The prevalent method – memorisation and regular practice (in the case of Mathematics) – do indeed require a certain amount of support at home and thus students, families and a working class culture come to be blamed. As Ramachandran (2004) points out there is little awareness among teachers and policymakers that ‘first generation learners’ may have a specific set of pedagogic needs. Lipman (1998), in her discussion of African-American students’ educational performance, shows that there is need on the part of teachers to scrutinise teaching strategies rather than blame students. Lipman (ibid: 91) argues that teachers who saw ‘low performance’ as ‘the mark of a failing education system’ worried about finding new ways of engaging their students in various learning activities.

Moreover, IWC students’ need for leisure, rest and adequate nutrition, or for care and empathy at school, were not considered either. Teachers need to be able to hear, and engage with, problems faced by students like Radha (ST) whose family circumstances have been recounted in the previous chapter. This excerpt from Radha and Payal’s (SC) interview echoes the same sentiment that Lipman articulates:

Radha: Sir *ji* says, ‘study for five minutes [at least]’, how can we? Sir *ji* says ‘there isn’t that much work either’, [he] says... (She was talking about Manish Tiwari.)

Payal: He should come and see.

Then there was the fundamental question of hunger. Early in my fieldwork, after a chat with some students during lunch break, I had noted in my field notebook:

Children don't eat enough during the first half of the day. They don't have anything more than tea, or, biscuits in the morning before leaving for school which began at 7.15 AM. They usually don't have lunch⁷⁵ at the school [because they] don't like the room where it is served and the food is cold. So they eat only at home after they go back from school at 12.40. (22/09/2014)

Rampal and Mander (2013) offer a rare discussion of the need for a 'pedagogy for empathy' in the context of marginalised children's educational experience in India. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme introduced nationally in 2001 was supposed to address 'classroom hunger' (Dreze and Goyal 2003: 4675) but failed to do so in practice thanks to the indifferent quality of the food offered to students. Rampal and Mander (2013) argue that textbooks and teachers offer only decontextualized understandings of hunger and suggest that pedagogic approaches and curricular texts need to engage with realities of poverty and hunger and their caste-class dimensions. Instead, classroom observations show clearly that the dominant notions of "difficulties", "struggle" and "hard work" in the context of formal schooling are rooted in a middle-class, upper caste ethos. I discuss class biases in curricular texts across subject areas in chapter 7 but I would like to introduce one example of teachers' understanding of, and inability to relate to, IWC students' everyday lives through the following fieldnote extract:

Prabha Shinde was lecturing pupils with reference to a Sanskrit lesson on life's struggles: 'You have no problems, you only have benefits. You don't have to climb any difficult mountains. No less than six teachers are coming to teach you! Madam is sitting here, sir is there, you don't have to climb any mountains at all!' Pointing to Ratna, Shinde madam continued, 'Her attention is still there – what to wear, what to eat, going to the market with mummy! Her attention is still not in the class!' (12/12/2014)

Thus, there is an assumption that IWC students do not care as much for doing well educationally. I had also witnessed Ratna (OBC) being slapped by Prabha Shinde once for being late in the morning; the girl was then asked to leave the classroom.

⁷⁵ The reference here is to the Mid-Day Meal offered at state schools in India. Children had also complained that it was unhygienic and tasted terrible.

Completely ignorant of the extremely conservative and patriarchal set up at Ratna's home, her family's financial struggles, her enormous work load every morning and the constant threat that she may be withdrawn from school after completing middle school, Prabha Shinde could not imagine Ratna's levels of stress: the girl was in the habit of slapping herself whenever she was angry about the little everyday injustices at home as she could not say anything about it. Given the multiple fronts on which several students struggled (in gendered ways) their refusal or failure to attend to a lesson was understandable. However, it was not so much that students did not make efforts, rather, that their efforts were usually not visible to teachers. For example, during revision classes before the annual examination, Ratna came to me with queries in Sanskrit, Prabha Shinde's subject. Ratna's fear had prevented her from approaching the teacher and thus the teacher remained unaware of the girl's efforts. This is an instance of the multiple kinds of disciplinary control to which the girl is subjected. Prabha Shinde, in judging and punishing the girl, (re)produces their genderclaste relationship in specific ways: as an upper caste, middle class woman who could afford to employ a domestic worker to take care of things at home, the teacher failed to understand the constraints, efforts or suffering of an IWC girl from a non-dominant caste. Such objectifying practices then required Ratna to produce herself as a certain kind of genderclasted subject who, in interests of survival, had to resort to practices of self-regulation (and harm) at home and school. However, Ratna's seeking help from me also shows that she refused the teacher's judgment of her as a "bad student" and was invested in doing well at school by looking for alternative ways to learn and thus pushing at the limitations of her situation.

As Delpit (1995: xiii) powerfully argues, teachers and administrators often 'look at "other people's children" and (only) see damaged and dangerous caricatures of the vulnerable and impressionable beings before them.' Such teachers are 'totally unable to perceive those different from themselves except through their own culturally clouded vision.' (ibid: xiv) Another morning Jyoti Gupta was very angry and frustrated and what she said that day is a representative summary of what she and the other teachers had said in the classroom or in their interviews with me. To some degree, all teachers seemed to have similar views about IWC children's levels of motivation, the atmosphere at home and the importance of corporal punishment.

Even Usha Pandey had once complained to me that the ban on corporal punishment was an obstacle. Delpit's arguments, referenced above, come to life in the following comments that Jyoti Tiwari made in the classroom one afternoon (fieldnotes):

'[Whether] we teach or not, we have come to the school and signed the register and our salary is assured... still we think that we should teach the kids! Even if we don't teach you, but what little we do, what are you taking from that?' / She says, 'you are only focused on movies, songs, heroines, and whether it's *poori*, *kheer* [in the Mid-Day Meal]...' / she told them that unless they memorise all word-meanings she is not going to teach further. They may complain to whoever they please... so all English language learning is reduced to the meanings of words [and] burden of teaching[-learning] is clearly on the kids. / 'That's the atmosphere at your home – get kicked, have your ear twisted, so you need the same at school – beat us or we won't do anything.' (08/10/2014)

Unless otherwise specified, all the teachers' comments cited in this chapter were addressed to the entire classroom. While not all students had the same reasons for not engaging or trying to learn, when teachers rebuked all students, in general, they failed to distinguish between students and the diverse sets of reasons each student had for having been unable to, or disinclined to, engage with classroom teaching. As evident in the foregoing discussion, according to the teachers, the responsibility for their "failure" lies with IWC students and their parents.

5.2.4 Parents' efforts and aspirations

Despite their constraints and the unreasonable expectations they faced at school, IWC parents and students made efforts to ensure the latter's educational success. Nambissan (1996: 1020) points out: 'What is noteworthy but little acknowledged is the extent of support, material and moral, that Dalit parents (and relatives) extend to their children despite poverty, 'lack of educational exposure' and the quality of schooling they experience.' For example, some of the parents were sending their kids for private tuition despite financial limitations. Such an example could be seen in Raviraj's family which belonged to a Dalit, or, SC community. His mother had recently begun to work as a construction worker in order to supplement the family income and often worked on Sundays as well.

Reva: Now in [Class] IX, X, it will become more expensive too...

Raviraj's mother: That's what! [If they] learn something now... Otherwise, it'll be like this... They will remain useless!

[...]

Raviraj's father: [If] they learn [now] they will learn, otherwise, later they won't be able to do anything.

Raviraj's mother: We try to educate them. See, I send them both to school too, send them for tuition too. But [it will work] only if they study. Now these two will say... They will hang their bags (indicating the coat peg near the door), will go there (to tuition teacher's house). 'Mummy madam's house is locked, mummy, madam is not at home', [they will tell me], you tell me [what can I do]...

Reva (looking at Raviraj and smiling): [You] lie to her that...

Raviraj's mother: [They] lie to me (emphatic)! [They] play marbles there, tell me, what [should I] do? And [tuition teacher] also yells, 'Raviraj's mother, see, Raviraj is playing here only, he was playing in this street, playing in that street'. Now what can I do?

Raviraj's father: [Should we] take care of our work or take care of them?

Despite parents' efforts, in the case of some students, going for additional coaching did not answer. They either still could not understand many concepts, or the tuition teachers had so many students that individual attention, again, became a casualty (Prakash had such an experience). Raviraj was a student who could not sit still at all; he also told me that the only subject he studied at home was English. At the same time, he was quite keen to read the story and popular science books (Hindi) I bought. Raviraj, like many other "bad" (talkative, disengaged) pupils in the classroom, would regularly express irritation with me if I did not bring new books faster, or could not get them a new book to read that was with another kid.

In addition to sending their children for private tuitions, some parents also sent the youngest child to a private school. Arif (Muslim, OBC) and Sharada (OBC) both told me that their youngest siblings (both boys⁷⁶) were in private primary schools; both also sounded proud of English being the medium of their siblings' education (Arif – 'at least one [of us] will become an *Angrez*⁷⁷'), how well their younger siblings were doing (Sharada – '[my brother] can read English too!'), and how strict the discipline

⁷⁶ If families had inadequate resources it was more likely that a son, rather than a daughter, would be sent to a private school (Manjrekar 2003; NCERT 2006).

⁷⁷ Angrez = one who speaks English, an Englishman. *Angrezi* = English.

was (Sharada – ‘in their school they get hit if they don’t study!’). Whatever the financial, emotional or physical cost, families – both parents and older siblings – were clearly invested in, at least, one child in the family being educationally successful. In addition, some parents also tried to teach their younger children themselves:

Raviraj’s mother: I have studied till [Class] IV. [I] can write too, can read too. Education is also necessary, right. But we have not studied like these people (indicating her kids).

Reva (to Raviraj): Why don’t you teach your mother? (Some children had reported doing that.)

Raviraj’s mother: He! I have to teach *him*. Have to teach this one (indicating her younger son who had been in Class V, and according to the mother, the more responsible and serious one). (She laughed) See, I have only studied till [Class] III, IV... And see, I am teaching a Class V kid. What else can I do, tell me?

Similarly, Vaishali (SC), whose father did not live with them, told me that her father had studied till Class IV or V and mother till Class V. Her mother could read and write Hindi, but not English, and read newspapers (though they did not buy one).

Vaishali: Yes, [my mother] knows Hindi. Mummy’s [hand]writing is very nice. (Grinning sheepishly) My mummy completes my copies! Right from the beginning she is very interested... / Yeah. My mummy always picks up my books and sits and reads... / She already knows Math / Multiplication tables also... She is always asking my brother (smiling), ‘How many tables do you know? Come here, and recite for me...’

Despite India’s history of caste-based exclusion, parents from Dalit and other non-dominant castes who had accessed education, tried to tap into that experience to support their children’s learning. Thus parents usually did everything they could, and summoned all resources that they could, in order to ensure that their children took education seriously and succeeded; however, like Sriprakash (2012), I also find that upper caste, middle class teachers often failed to appreciate IWC parents’ constraints and investments. The police logic constituted by the deficit model also renders IWC parents’ efforts ‘insensible’; such a distribution of the sensible renders parents visible only in certain roles and as such, lacking certain abilities and values. Parents of government school children are seen as classed-casted individuals who do not make sufficient effort; moreover, given the deficit view of IWC families and/or non-dominant castes, teachers do not perceive any need to get to know students and parents in order to understand their concerns and efforts. The caste-based

distance from, and conceptualisation of, labouring people translates into upper caste teachers' inability to see them as '[any]thing other than their social identity' (Pelletier 2009).⁷⁸ There is a refusal to 'multiply the images' (ibid: 11) of working class parents; to see them not only as workers, but also as parents invested in their children's education and doing the best they can.

5.3 A 'thesis of equality': students' intelligence and teachers' blinders

5.3.1 Dilip: making sense of stratified schooling

I now discuss an interview I did with Dilip (SC) and Dilshad (Muslim, OBC). It was usually Dilip who answered my questions; Dilshad was often very quiet during interviews though he was quite talkative otherwise. Thus, sitting on the low wall protecting some plants adjacent to the school gate, we ended up discussing the problems Dilip had been facing in coping with his studies and his concerns regarding his education and future. These excerpts help understand problems faced by IWC students whose immediate family-members are not formally educated and who continue to be in a difficult financial condition (Dilip's family circumstances were mentioned in chapter 4). As evidenced in the responsibilities assigned to him by his teachers, the latter saw Dilip as a "good" student; he was a rare example among boys who was asked to assist teachers with academic and administrative work.

Reva: So who helps you prepare for tests?

Dilip: No one. Teacher tells us what to memorise.

While both girls and boys had reported obtaining help from siblings or neighbours, this was possible only for a small number of students. There were others who faced problems like Dilip's; Dilshad went for private tuition. Both the boys aspired to upward mobility and realised that the education they had was inadequate:

⁷⁸ Implications of the distance between the upper castes and the labouring castes are further discussed in chapter 6.

Reva: So what do you think you have to do for that (upward mobility)?

Dilip: [We] have to study.

Dilshad: Studying...

[...]

Reva: [By] studying, [do] you mean what you are doing now, this will be enough?

Dilip (immediately): *Tscha!* (It's an exclamation meaning 'no')

[...]

Dilip: Apart from this also [we will] have to do things...

At first, they were not able to say clearly what else they needed to do, but when I asked where they will attend school if they could choose, they both chose private schools. Based on the experiences of their friends who attended private schools in their neighbourhood, the two boys also told me what would be different:

Dilip: [We] have seen those students (he meant the private school we were discussing), students who go there do well in studies. Those who are weak are a different story, but those who [study], they also know English well, and my friend is in that school. They also behave well.

Reva (laughing): So you aren't well-behaved?

Dilip: No, I mean, not like that, I mean on the part of the school...like that, [my friend] says [they] teach computer, teach everything, that's what. They are taught in every period. They have a lab[oratory] there, in that school...

Dilshad: In Science...

Dilip: In Science... [They] do [activities] and show everything, whatever is there...

Then we talked about what else could solve the problem and over a long exchange, Dilip talked about the following:

Dilip: At home it's like, there is no one to teach [us] so I don't like it at home at all. And if one sits alone then younger siblings are sitting so you don't feel like... Now what will you ask them? [...] *They* will ask *us*. So you haven't asked them anything. If there is someone older, then asking them... you feel like, yes, this one will know. [You] can't ask younger [siblings].

Dilip also spoke about the infrastructure issues in that interview:

Dilip: There are ninety-ninety students in one classroom. [...] And now, what sir, madam teach, I cannot even understand that. Sometimes I feel like I don't want to study at all. Madam says, right, that if anyone who doesn't want to study, [should] go home, I also wish that I should leave. But I think what will madam think? [That] these people study [and] even they have gone. Sometimes that's what I wish (to leave).

Then I asked Dilip what he found difficult to understand:

Dilip: Sometimes [I] cannot understand Sanskrit at all. Science, yes, sometimes [I] can understand. When madam teaches well. / Only, if she is always teaching, then I cannot understand. / The Math, that Tiwari sir teaches I cannot understand at all. [...] Cannot understand that much when sir teaches. / English, I can understand. / [In English, we] cannot read the very big words, [words] that are difficult.

Some students also spoke about their siblings who had quit school either because they could not cope, or because families needed additional incomes desperately. In such cases, parents also hoped and expected that the remaining kid will do well at school:

Dilip: Older brother, mine...work, goes to work so [parents] expect from me only. They say, 'you only will study, now only you are there at home, no one else is there who can study.' My younger brother is also not studying. [...] It's like that because he doesn't feel like studying at all... Still, he is coming. Now if I tell madam, [she] will say, 'keep him at home!'.

[...]

Reva: You don't get angry at times at this whole situation? That [we] are trapped so badly that there is no way out?

Dilip: That's what, sometimes if I think about it I feel terrible. Sometimes if I am sitting quietly, such thoughts come to my mind, something horrible. Still, what can one say? We can't do anything. That's it, life will [continue] as it is...

[...]

Dilip: I've studied earlier... Till [Class V] I was taught... Math... till [Class V], very well. I used to top in every subject. But now, I don't know. These people gave too much freedom in Class VI. And sir did not teach at all in Class VI.

Reva: Who was there in Class VI?

Dilip: In [Class VI]... Bhargav sir. Half the time, [it was] Vishwakarma sir.

Reva: No. Who taught Math?

Dilip: The same. Tiwari sir only taught [us Math].

Dilip's responses show that even "good" students struggle to cope, that accusing students or parents of not making arrangements for appropriate academic support is not the solution because students know that they need help but cannot afford it; and that breaks and disruptions severely hurt students' chances of doing well at school in the long run. Ramachandran (2004) notes that 'first generation learners' find it harder to learn in large classrooms while Murali Krishna (2012) and Nambissan

(1996) highlight the problems of Dalit students who experience a cultural distance and disconnect from teachers. Even though most teachers generally liked Dilip, he was unable to talk to them about his problems at home. I suggest that teachers' views of impoverished and 'labour class' parents, discussed earlier in this chapter, could have discouraged students from talking about lack of academic support and other resources at home.

In addition, there needs to be an examination of both pedagogic strategies and curricula because even students who are motivated (and even desperate to learn) and pay attention in class were not learning what teachers expected them to learn. Certainly, insisting that everyone must learn in exactly the same way, is not helpful. First generation learners need better, not worse, infrastructure. Most importantly, there certainly needs to be much greater empathy for IWC students' and their families' problems. It is also important to keep in mind the historical caste-relations that have educationally disadvantaged "lower" caste families. The overall idea of a "good" student and the normative notion of "childhood" that guide educational practice represent the institutionalisation of certain genderclasted ways of being (Kumar 2013, Pappu and Vasanta 2010). Since the lives of most students in this classroom were far removed from these ideals, I suggest that they neither managed to fulfil their teachers' expectations nor talk to them about their concerns.

At the same time, I view Dilip's ability to make sense of his oppression and to strive for ways to survive and/or succeed at school as a Dalit, IWC student as his 'verification' of his equality. He did not need anyone to explain his oppression to him; he was developing the ability to make sense of his socioeconomic limitations as well as opportunities. As such, his verification of his intellectual equality was an example of a Rancierean disruption of the theory/practice divide and entailed political subjectivation. Dilip was doing his best to enact the "good" student despite his frustrations with classroom infrastructure and teaching and his insights into the way stratification of education offered him an unenviable bargain. While he saw himself as unable to control his circumstances, he also refused to give up and forced himself to attend school and engage with the teaching. Again, this combination of frustration, tenacity and emotional-intellectual labour is denied by teachers' clasted expectations and view of students like Dilip. Caste is an important factor here: many

students' intelligence or tenacity is not valued because, in general, the importance of physical labour and financial struggles is not valued within the discourses of formal education where the 'educational ideal' is a middleclass uppercaste child who does not face such socioeconomic odds. Nor do these discourses appreciate knowledges that accrue through the kind of labour that has traditionally been the domain of the so-called lower castes.

5.3.2 Rahul Singh: the 'will' to learn

One winter afternoon, Rahul Singh (UC) insisted that he be interviewed and, to my surprise, we talked for more than hour without him once wanting to leave. This was mid-January and we had had severe winter for a month due to which every other day state authorities would issue orders for school closure. So on any given day students were no longer sure if the school was open or not. As a result, attendance fell. End of January was also time for Assembly elections in the state and Pramod Bhargav and M L Vishwakarma had to be away some days on training. Prabha Shinde was away all month as her daughter was getting married in January. So there was little teaching and learning in January. This was very disruptive as students were only beginning to adjust to the changed school timings and every few pages in my field notebooks, I jotted down that students were upset about it.

Rahul Singh (UC) and I began with a discussion of the fees that he would have to pay in High School. According to the RTE Act 2009 education is free only till middle school (Class I to VIII) and in High School (Class IX, X) students are expected to pay something between INR five hundred and seven hundred in fees alone. Rahul Singh told me he was planning to work over the summer to earn enough to cover his school fees though he was neither sure of what sort of work would pay enough, nor even of the exact amount he needed to earn. Then we spoke about his interests:

Reva: What does Rahul like to do?

Rahul: I? I like working.

Reva: What sort of work?

Rahul: Anything... Whatever I can get... [Like, at the] Cloth Market, in *Rajwada*... (He mentioned the main market for clothing and fabrics in the centre of what is now the older part of Indore. It's a thriving market area

and many students, like Raviraj and Mohan, had mentioned having worked there at some point or the other.)

Reva: What sort of work do you like? Have you done any work? [Have you] learnt some work?

Rahul: I did...one day I went and learnt [how to make] belts. The belts for school *na*, for private schools, [I] made those. You know how they are made? For making belts, it is cut, the belts *na*, [you] do like this (he gesticulated excitedly to show me how different parts of the belt were made and fit into each other)...and there is the hook *na*, [it's] attached to that, then it has that...that's joined [with it], then you get the belt.

Rahul told me that he liked to learn new things. In the course of this interview he described his work at two other places where he had learnt new skills but had come back without taking his payment and had not gone back either. His parents had not wanted him to go to work, or go far from home, but he kept trying to go:

Reva: So why did you go? Okay, and tell me when did you go for all these things?

Rahul: This happened a long time ago. When I was in [Class] VII.

Reva: So why did you go?

Rahul: Just like that. To learn. [I] didn't ask mummy before going. (We laughed). I went that day, took sixty rupees, I didn't give it to mummy...
[...]

Reva: Okay, so tell me, why do you like going to work?

Rahul: I like it... If you go to work *na*, then whatever happens here (at school), what do we have to do with that? [You] come back from work, happily have dinner, go to sleep... (*unclear*) then come back from school, eat and leave, go back to work. You get money, and you get work done.

Thus Rahul begins and ends his description of his day with work and explicitly frames school life as secondary in the above excerpt. I suggest that work offered meaning and direction; it was something *accomplished*, whereas conceptual gaps, cultural distance from teachers, textbook content and processes and inadequate infrastructure resulted in barriers to learning in the classroom. The wages also symbolised work successfully done, in addition to adding to low family incomes. I observed similar investments in extra-academic or non-school learning, on the part of some other boys; many of these boys refused to (consistently) engage with classroom teaching, but were keen on learning skills outside school. For example, there was Prakash (OBC) whose family circumstances are detailed in chapter 4. He

also told me that he did not understand much in the Mathematics or Science classrooms, but that he liked going to school because of his friends' company. As I showed in chapter 4, Prakssh played an important role in his family's financial survival and as a result, had little leisure outside of school hours. At school, he spent most of his time drawing elaborate and intricate patterns such as may be found on textiles like bed-sheets, or curtains. He would draw relentlessly during lessons and create numerous patterns every day. Then there was Shivam (UC); Shweta, his twin sister who studied in the same classroom, told me that Shivam was good at electrical repairs and was often asked to do odd jobs in the neighbourhood. During a visit to their home I also saw evidence of his skill as a carpenter.

However, in the classroom, mental labour was opposed to two other kinds of work: manual labour like construction work or grazing cattle; and the other was any kind of creative ability whether it was pottery, dancing or drawing. The first distinction was reinforced in speech quite regularly through threatening remarks made by teachers to the effect that if the children did not study they will be grazing cattle (*gai-bail charana*) or doing other manual labour (*beldari karna, hammali karna*) to make a living. The second distinction was reinforced in the very structure of the school day: there were no resources for engagement in arts, crafts or sports. The following fieldnotes show what futures some teachers envisage for IWC students:

Usha Pandey thinks that these kids will progress – move up a bit – through their skill set (as opposed to scholastic ability or school success) by which she means things they can do – electrician's work, embroidery and so on. (31/03/2015)

Thus, Usha Pandey did not expect the current cohort, most of whom were 'first generation learners', to achieve substantial upward mobility as a result of educational success and ability. As Lipman (1998: 81) has argued, '[teachers] believed that student deficiencies, rooted in social conditions beyond the school, posed an insurmountable obstacle.' At the same time, as Murali Krishna (2012) points out, teachers and teaching-learning processes ignore and deny the knowledges and capabilities students from non-dominant caste groups bring with them: whether it is an ability to earn and support the family, various creative abilities or an ability to care. Lipman (ibid: 88) argues that that there is need to 'recognize

and capitalize' on such intellectual ability and for teachers to interrogate their existing views of students and their families.

This is why Rancière's thesis of equality is tremendously useful in challenging prevalent classification of students (capable/incapable), abilities (mental/physical) and intelligences (superior/inferior). The willingness to see all students as equally capable of learning and different kinds of abilities as manifestations of the same intelligence opens up the possibility of seeing students as capable of succeeding in formal education as well. That is, teachers needed to be able to see the knowledges and skills students brought to the classroom as evidence of their intellectual ability rather than as something that did not require intellectual effort. Instead of seeing students' skills and knowledges and thus their intellectual capacity, as being less valuable than school knowledge if teachers were to see scholastic, creative and physical abilities as manifestations of the same intelligence, then students' existing knowledge and skills could be used to encourage them to apply themselves to school work as well. Such a view of learners, ability and intelligence requires important changes to the ways in which dominant narratives of class, caste and the division and hierarchy of labour are constructed in larger society as well as within schools. Equally important, as I shortly discuss, teachers' education and training experience also assume significance here.

While the majority of students in this classroom belonged to non-dominant castes, there were also upper caste students among the IWC who brought a range of skills and interests to the classroom that were not valued. To understand the ramifications of this situation the importance of caste as an analytical category must be underscored; it is the caste-based hierarchisation of occupations and knowledges⁷⁹ that has been institutionalised in and through school curricula and pedagogies in India. At the same time, this institutionalisation affects IWC students irrespective of their caste locations in contemporary urban India; this is why class as an analytical category must also be retained in sociological analyses of education. Further, caste is significant not only in terms of individual students' or teachers' locations but also

⁷⁹ For detailed discussion, see chapter 2.

as a historical organising principle of classroom social relations, pedagogy and curriculum. The caste-system values some kinds of knowledges while devaluing others, particularly, those gained by IWC students in order to survive. Such hierarchies are unfair and continue to reproduce specific kinds of educational and socioeconomic disadvantage because of the historical division of knowledge and labour on the basis of caste.

In this context, using Ranciere's formulation allows me to move beyond suggestions for pedagogic and curricular reform and instead articulate a view of learners and teacher-pupil relationship that fundamentally assumes an equality of intelligence and thus a respect for what students across differences of class, caste, gender and religion know and can do. Further, in the specific context of Indian formal education it has another set of implications. To begin with equality, I argue, also means to begin with the political will and financial commitment to provide all students with adequate resources irrespective of their socioeconomic status, in general, and their ability to pay for education, in particular. For example, the increasingly neoliberal Indian state cannot justify offering greater resources to students and teachers in central government run schools than it does to state government run schools. This is not to say that all student or teachers communities need the same resources, but that they all deserve whatever resources they need in their specific contexts. This is not an appeal for uniformity, rather for an assumption of equal worthiness and capacity.

Since I have discussed teachers' attitudes and practices in detail in this chapter I find it important to briefly discuss the state of teacher education as well. Poonam Batra's (2005, 2006, 2009, 2014) work is especially crucial to this discussion: she has argued that teacher education needs to be problematized (2005, 2014), particularly in terms of its stagnation, bureaucratisation, lack of space for teachers' agency and voice and its refusal to offer teachers the experience that is seen as ideal for learning in schools. Noting that school education continues to be dominated by upper-caste teachers (Batra 2005) she has rightly pointed out that if teachers are not equipped to reflect on their own socio-political locations, or their experience of education and work, they cannot be expected to relate to their students across gendercaste differences, or help the latter analyse these. As mentioned earlier, teachers being from the same

socioeconomic backgrounds as students may also not help in a system in which genderclaste biases have been institutionalised since its inception (Kumar 2013, Nambissan 1996). As anti-caste reformer and leader Jyotiba Phule argued more than a hundred years ago – and, unfortunately, this remains true even today – there is need for a much larger number of teachers from traditionally marginalised communities, if changes to institutional discourses are to happen within schools. Today, such changes would also require teacher education programmes to develop greater space for teachers’ voices, in general, and for voices of teachers from non-dominant class-caste groups, in particular.

5.3.3 “Bad” students? “Good” students?: ‘disrupting categories’⁸⁰

In this subsection I discuss the efforts of some of the “bad” students in the classroom. As discussed in this chapter, class-caste locations of teachers, pedagogic strategies and infrastructure combined to create the police logic that allowed only certain abilities, efforts and categories to be visible and rendered all other kinds of efforts and abilities invisible. There are several reasons why students’ efforts remain invisible and unappreciated: large number of students in the classroom, unimaginative pedagogic practices, inadequate teacher education, teachers’ lack of understanding of epistemology, sociology and theories of learning (Batra 2014) and increasing attempts by the state to micromanage teachers’ styles of work and time (Sarangapani 2010). Secondly, there is no possibility of allowing differential paces of learning; within the police logic of the classroom a “lower” pace of learning inevitably becomes an indicator of an individual’s “inferior” intelligence. However, following fieldnotes show that those classified as “bad” students actually not only made efforts but also important judgments about which instructions to follow and why.

[It] breaks my heart to see how painstakingly some of the children do all the ‘formal’ stuff: drawing lines after each answer, underlining, beautifying [homework and exam notebooks]... / The seriousness and ‘*lagan*’⁸¹ with which they do it, as if that would ensure success in education – isn’t it wrong

⁸⁰ Pelletier 2009: 17.

⁸¹ *Lagan* = sincerity, specifically, in doing or learning something.

of the teachers, system to stress form (as opposed to content) so that children begin to think form is more important than content?' (20/09/2014)

Rahul doesn't pay attention half the time but is religiously sticking together torn parts of his Science textbook. (28/10/2014)

Surprisingly enough, Prakash is doing what Shinde madam asked them to do: copy a lesson in their notebooks. It seems that a lot of children do what they can and don't bother with what they can't. / Also painstakingly, with a serious expression on his face, he is "completing" his Science notebook.... One, it's tangible proof that something has been done [in the classroom] - it's going to be corrected and signed [by the HM] and two, it's something he *can* do. Math, English, understanding stuff, answering questions is not something he can do. So perhaps [completing notebooks] feels more rewarding. The expression on his face is different when he's given up and cannot be bothered to follow instructions. And when he actually wants and intends to get the job done. (30/10/2014)

I can see Pawan⁸² tracing diagrams of cells in his textbook: the impressions made thus in his notebook - [he] will then turn it into a full-fledged diagram - but doesn't seem to have labelled [diagrams in his notebook]. (27/11/2014)

Stories like Taruna's (SC) are also quite insightful. When I first began fieldwork Taruna used to be almost completely disengaged from classroom teaching and activities. Eventually I found out that she had had low Haemoglobin and consequently, had often felt tired. She was being treated at the nearby District Hospital for her problem; and over the course of my fieldwork, I saw her change, presumably also as a result of the treatment. She began to take greater interest in her classmates and in the teaching; however, the change was slow and she often slid backwards in her efforts and her grasp of concepts. She had needed much greater support, kindness, faith and patience than was possible in a large classroom, or could be expected from teachers who had no support or incentive for imagining more than one kind of learner or learning. Early in my fieldwork I had noted the following during English class one day:

Taruna's now closed her book and is observing some insect moving on the floor near her. Jyoti Gupta is reading and doing the questions for an unseen passage given in the textbook. Taruna is not even looking in the book - sitting with her head resting on the dais in front of her. She cannot read English.

⁸² UC category.

Taruna (SC) had usually sat in the first row as she had an eyesight issue and could not see very well from rows any farther back. However, she also often did not open her books and notebooks. But this changed gradually over the year, particularly and surprisingly, in Mathematics class. In December, when the pressure for the *Pratibha Parv* was increasing and teachers were conducting mock oral tests almost every day students were asked to memorise particular lessons in each subject every day. One day, Taruna came to me for help with preparation for that day's English test (fieldnotes written after our conversation):

[Taruna requested], 'teacher, ask me [questions] from *vividh prashnavali*⁸³ once'. She understands the procedure [of] pedagogy and evaluation but can't (always) work up the interest, motivation or respect for people or processes. (12/12/2014)

Secondly, since Manish Tiwari had been teaching Class VIII students almost every day Taruna seemed to be making an effort to learn Mathematics. Whenever he had the time to do so, Manish Tiwari repeatedly explained everything he did and frequently asked students if they understood various concepts. For example, in early December, Manish Tiwari had invited Taruna to recite multiplication tables in front of the class (fieldnotes from Mathematics class):

She tried to speak twice and then Manish Tiwari asked her to write. [He praised] her for her courage and confidence in speaking before 3 teachers (including me) and the whole class.... [He is] very warm and supportive today. / Got people to clap after [multiplication tables of] 9 and after 12. (01/12/2014)

Another thing that surprised me was that Taruna began to tackle Mathematics sums on her own. One afternoon, she and some other girls came to me asking for help with a long division sum. I jotted down in my field notebook that afternoon:

On a pleasantly surprising note, girls previously completely uninterested in Math are trying to engage and do sums on their own. Manish Tiwari's efforts and perhaps my presence are helping: he spends a lot of time going over past concepts and doing sums. Asks them to practice and if they are afraid to ask him questions they come to me – particularly girls. (10/12/2014)

⁸³ These were practice exercises containing different kinds of questions – short answer, multiple choice, fill in the blanks, long answer questions. These were provided in all textbooks.

Yet, earlier in her regular Mathematics class that day, Taruna had, as usual, refused to jot down from the black board what her teacher, Preeti Mali, had written:

I've asked Taruna why she's not writing as part of her interview and she often shrugs or laughs at the question because she perhaps thinks that I've no right to ask. Today [during Mathematics class] she snapped back: 'what good will it be to write?' [Just] before that waving her hand at the blackboard full of sums [Preeti Mali had solved], she had asked the world at large, '[you have] written so much, explain what it is [too]!' (10/12/2014)

Preeti Mali had been doing geometry sums. Most of the students in her class had needed to cover a lot of conceptual ground before they could engage with concepts like Pythagoras' theorem. However, there was no systematic support available for this. Moreover, the kinds of efforts I have discussed above were usually not visible to the teachers. This could primarily have been the result of there being too many students. With large class-sizes and the wide range of their educational and social experiences, the differences in students' abilities and paces were mind-boggling; each student had needed support tailored to her needs. In Preeti Mali's case, her approach could also have been part of the problem for Taruna. Preeti Mali had been the Guest Teacher till January 2015. She belonged to the OBC community, taught Mathematics, never hit any of the students and was unable to engage the majority of students in her class. She usually spoke softly, focused on the students sitting in the front rows and ignored what the rest did. She knew Mathematics, but could not get students to attend to her. In view of the meagre daily wages – INR 150 per day – that Guest Teachers were paid, it seemed unfair to expect much effort in any case. Preeti Mali wrote solutions to the sums in the Mathematics textbook on the blackboard, but often did not explain each step in detail. Mathematics was a subject most students reportedly found difficult and it required a lot of sustained effort on the part of a teacher to keep them engaged and ensure that they learnt something. This problem was arguably compounded by the fact that Preeti Mali had also had a deficit view of her students and did not expect most of them to ever make much educational progress.

Further, the above examples show that sometimes the "bad" students in the classroom blurred the distinction between "good" and "bad" students by selectively following instructions and/or making efforts to engage and learn. Teachers' refusal

to see these students' efforts sought to further objectify the students when in fact, the students were quietly resisting a stultifying education: by questioning teachers' practices as well as refusing their own identification as "bad students". Taruna (SC), Ratna (OBC), Pawan (UC) and Prakash (OBC) were often targets of teachers' rebukes, even those teachers' whom they liked and respected. But when they liked a teacher, these students made efforts to engage with that teacher's instructions as far as they could. Since support and space for greater effort was lacking (for example, more individual interaction with teachers, or the freedom to progress at one's pace) students identified and tried to do the things that they thought they could. Lastly, since a stultifying pedagogy does not allow for dissimilar paths to learning, teachers failed to see when a student was making efforts. Lastly, as the fieldnotes in this section show, girls came to me seeking support for learning more than boys did. This is related to the themes I discuss in the next chapter: the moral policing that shored up Brahmanical patriarchy served to distance girls from even the women teachers. Secondly, girls were, perhaps, more invested in school success because their education was under greater threat of being discontinued as I showed in chapter 4.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on pedagogic processes taking place in the classroom and the social relations inscribing these processes. The purpose was to unpack the ways in which specific genderclaste relations are (re)produced in and through classroom processes. Specifically, this interrogation of teaching-learning processes and students' experiences has offered insights into how students' classroom experiences, abilities, learning opportunities and motivation to succeed are shaped by their individual genderclaste locations as well as historical and evolving power structures in urban India.

The discussion of urban IWC children's constraints, concerns and responsibilities in chapter four provides the background with reference to which the findings of this chapter need to be engaged; together, the two chapters show why many of the expectations that children face at school are often untenable. The institutionalised

discourse of educational success and performance in classrooms renders invisible the lived realities of students who occupy social locations different from those of the ideal “child” assumed by education policy and practice. In particular, as shown in chapters 2 and 4, the normative notion of childhood tends to see the child in isolation from the family and community; this individuation plays an important role in obscuring the way sociocultural and economic difference shapes the learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. As such, the institutionalised discourse of individual effort and ability also plays a vital role in (further) distancing IWC and non-dominant caste students from their teachers, even when the teachers do not belong to dominant caste groups. Educational success and failure are constructed solely as a consequence of individual ability and effort rather than also being understood as a consequence of larger power relations that inscribe an individual’s efforts and shape the in/visibility of her intellectual abilities.

I have shown that the primary pedagogic strategy in this classroom was memorisation which required a certain kind of support at home. Since this kind of support was not available to most pupils, parents and students struggled in different ways to ensure success at school. Parents who could afford to do so, sent their children for private tuition; it was these pupils who had managed to consistently be successful at school. Others had failed to learn what they should have, or were beginning to struggle as conceptual challenges intensified at the end of middle school. The narrow range of teaching approaches in evidence also led to students losing motivation, confidence and interest in classroom teaching. In addition, the limited set of subjects, activities and teaching-learning methods available in this category of schools also denied a large number of students the opportunity to deploy the skills and capacities they brought to the classroom in the interests of their learning and growth. Many such skills (like carpentry or drawing) failed to attract the attention, let alone, appreciation and respect of teachers thus reinforcing the binary opposition between mental and physical labour and skills as well as the caste hierarchies underpinning this binary. Using Ranciere I have shown how the principle of explanation and the primacy of memorisation as the means of learning tend to ‘stultify’ students’ capacities rather than encouraging them to learn in their own different ways.

Teachers, more often than not, failed to see how historical and evolving caste-based exclusion shaped students' ability to access support for educational success and thus affected these students' educational achievement; they also failed to appreciate the kind of efforts students and parents made to ensure educational survival and success for the former. Instead, teachers tended to blame parents for their lack of responsibility and concern, and students for their lack of interest and motivation to study. This lack of critical understanding and empathy was partly a function of teachers' caste location as they came largely from upper-caste, middleclass communities and brought certain worldviews with them; further, the clasted nature of gender relations invisibilised IWC girls' problems, or their efforts to learn, for the teachers. However, I have also shown that individual students' or teachers' locations do not always determine their attitudes, experiences or actions; the institutionalisation of individuating practices and clasted worldviews also work independently of an individual's locations. I have argued that these two factors also combined to discourage "weaker" students from approaching teachers for academic support.

This chapter accomplishes one of the central tasks this thesis set itself: excavating some of the genderclasted narratives of urban children's education in contemporary India. Through a systematic investigation of teaching-learning strategies, teachers' views, pupils' and parents' efforts and students' ability to reflect and learn I have attempted to challenge discourses that construct the student in a state school as a "*sarkari bacha*". I have argued that educational stratification that determines the quality of schools available to these students must be challenged; and that state government students are capable of, and invested in, making efforts to succeed at school. I have discussed some of the reasons why IWC students are not able to engage with classroom teaching, or make progress as quickly as required at school. Thus, I have unpacked and subverted the image of the *sarkari bacha* as unreliable, irresponsible and inefficient to show that there is need to interrogate this narrative as well as the actual classroom setting and processes in which the *sarkari baccha* struggles to learn and survive.

This chapter offers important insights into the way power relations work in and through education. As Lisa Delpit notes,

‘...power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential. Indeed, in the educational institutions of this country, the possibilities for poor people and for people [from historically marginalised caste groups] to define themselves, to determine the self each should be, involve a power that lies outside of the self. It is others who determine how they should act, how they are to be judged. When one “we” gets to determine the standards for all “wes”, then some “wes” are in trouble!’ (Delpit 1995: xv)

As I discuss in the next chapter these standards include teaching and learning not only of the official curriculum but also that of a ‘moral curriculum’. This moral curriculum entails evaluation of students (and by extension, families and communities) against standards deriving from upper-caste and middle-class worldviews, which in turn, lead to students being shamed and punished into adherence to the moral curriculum. However, as I found, despite the dominance of such moral sensibilities within the classroom discourse students also find ways to mount challenges to this curriculum.

Chapter 6

A moral curriculum and escapades into ‘equality’: can the “*jaanwar*” be schooled?

‘*Jaanwar*’ is the Hindi word for ‘animal’ and was frequently used by two of the teachers to address, or refer to, students. As I show in this chapter it plays an important role in teachers’ articulation of certain moral sensibilities and their efforts to implement what I call the ‘moral curriculum’. In its turn, this moral curriculum is crucial to the (re)production of certain genderclaste hierarchies in the classroom. In this chapter I bring out its specificities with reference to the larger context of Brahmanical patriarchy, neoliberalism, middle class sensibilities and religious nationalism. This moral curriculum is linked in crucial ways to: 1) the pedagogic processes discussed in chapter five and 2) the formal curriculum transacted in the classroom which is discussed in chapter seven. In this thesis I argue that focusing on these three components of classroom processes helps understand how the specific police logics of teaching-learning on the one hand, and wider social relations on the other, are sought to be reinforced. These police logics are supposed to teach students their roles and places and particular ways of being in and beyond the classroom.

The limited scholarship that exists on the abovementioned issues, whilst not using the term moral curriculum, unpacks the negotiation of nationalist ideologies and processes of regulation of gender in Indian classrooms across a range of schools (Bhattacharjee 1999; Froerer 2007; Benei 2008, 2009; Thapan 2006; Alam 2013; Pappu and Vasanta 2010). As discussed in chapter two, of this scholarship, only Bhattacharjee’s (1999) looks at pupils’ negotiation of gender relations and images in a primary school classroom; however, her work does not take claste hierarchies into account. Though Pappu and Vasanta (2010)’s work offers a rare discussion of teaching-learning with reference to the urban social context of class-caste relations and gendered labour, this work does not attend to the contestations and complexity characterising everyday classroom discourse. Similarly, while Benei’s (2008) work helps deconstruct classroom texts as these seek to produce binaries of “us”/Hindus

and “them”/Muslims, it does not look at the experience of Muslim pupils in the classroom.

Thus existing scholarship either fails to take intersecting power relations into account or students’ contestation and accommodation of dominant worldviews. I systematically address both these gaps in this chapter. The notion of morality helps underscore the powerful sense of “right” and “wrong” attached to various ways of being in the classroom. The notion of *curriculum* emphasises the distinct elements constituting this discourse of morality, their relationship to each other as well as the sheer weight of this moral curriculum. I begin with an analysis of the terms ‘*jaanwar*’ and ‘labour class’ in the context of the class-caste composition of the classroom; the historical role of caste-based hierarchies of status and division of labour and the IWC background of the students. I show that this class background is central to the entire process of disbursement of welfare benefits at school and becomes an important aspect of the moral curriculum in view of the Indian state’s neoliberal approach to labour rights, informalisation and welfare. I further show that students’ class and caste backgrounds and teachers’ perception of the former’s cultural context provoke constant moralising on the importance of ‘keeping clean’. This notion of “cleanliness” entails the ‘hygiene’ of mind, body and spirit, and is often articulated through references to (Hindu) religious and spiritual practice. I also unpack the moral policing to which girls are subjected within a logic of Brahmanical patriarchy in terms of their clothing and their interaction with boys as well as the way in which this policing further complicates relationships between boys and girls in the classroom. With reference to this moral policing I specifically interrogate Dalit girls’ experiences in this classroom. My focus on Dalit and Muslim students in a state government school is an important contribution of this thesis as such engagements are rare in the Indian sociology of education. The final component of the moral curriculum can be discerned in Muslim students’ contradictory experiences in a setting where some teachers regularly construct Muslims as foreigners and “others” while simultaneously upholding individual Muslim students as “good” students.

In the last section of the chapter I grapple with the range of ways in which students negotiate this moral curriculum using Foucault’s and Ranciere’s respective engagements with the notion of subjectivity which I outlined in chapter two. Insights

from this discussion regarding reasons for “compliance”, costs of “non-compliance”, students’ efforts to make sense of difference and the significance of students’ resistance are a central contribution of this thesis. My use of Ranciere’s notion of politics makes this contribution especially significant because it entails explicit challenges to the police logic of dominant genderclaste relations.

6.1 Construction of the labour class child and the ‘*jaanwar*’

The labels, ‘*jaanwar*’ and ‘labour class’, which are used by teachers to address the children in this classroom, represent a certain view of these students’ sociocultural locations. Since most of the students in this classroom are from non-dominant castes and the informal working-class, and since teachers often used these labels to refer to the entire classroom, it is important to interrogate the disciplinary work these terms (are expected to) do; in this chapter, it is precisely this interrogation that I undertake. I found that Prabha Shinde, with whose class the academic day began, used the term ‘*jaanwar*’ most frequently. Frustrated with her administrative workload, she often reminded students of the “favours” the state was doing them (fieldnotes from her classes):

Prabha Shinde is always snapping at them, biting their heads off.⁸⁴ / She asked, ‘Why don’t you get school uniforms stitched? Government has given you the money!’ (17/09/2014)

‘You don’t have to spend anything...!’ Prabha Shinde reminded students that in High school they will have to pay... [...] ‘These animals don’t know anything, [but] all are ready to speak up!’ (24/09/2014)

In chapter five I also showed that Pramod Bhargav was often physically and verbally aggressive with the students. Not only were the children being constructed as “bad” students because they were “disorderly” or “ignorant”, but also, as such, less worthy of being counted as human beings. ‘Order’ itself has also been seen as a middle class

⁸⁴ I later discovered that she had several health issues which were also the consequence of difficulties she had faced at the beginning of her job as a school teacher. She and Jyoti Gupta were often in pain due to ill-health. While this circumstance does not excuse their treatment of students it is important to remember some of these aspects of women teachers’ life beyond school.

value; for example, Kumar (2013: 21) argues that within the colonial discourse of education and morality in India “order” stood for the state’s contribution to the bourgeoisie’s pleasure’. One day, Usha Pandey, who thought “labour class” children were unmanageable⁸⁵, listed the features that I understand as characterising “labour class” households in her view (fieldnotes after conversation with Usha Pandey in the corridor):

Small houses (lack of privacy), drinking, TV and phones, health care, parents don’t watch over kids all the time. (27/01/2015)

I suggest that the term “labour class” contains references to, and obscures, ‘caste’; that it reflects the casteist ‘contempt for the labouring classes and for labour as such’ (Kothari 2014: 66). Teachers find ‘references to ‘class’ more acceptable than ‘caste’ (as Sriprakash 2012 also found) thanks to the complicated relationship between the category and language of caste and the invention of India as modern nation state. Pandian (2002: 1735) notes that the “secular”, “modern” elite of the newly independent India would have liked to wish caste away: 1) by designating it as part of the inner cultural sphere of the nation, or 2) by ‘transcoding caste’ that is, ‘talk[ing] of caste by other means’ rather than ‘talk[ing] of caste on its ‘own terms’ or *naming* it as groups struggling against caste-based domination have done. As Pandian (ibid:1735) further argues, ‘[t]he act of transcoding is an act of acknowledging and disavowing caste at once.’

Additionally, in Indore, ‘labour’ is the term used to refer to ‘labourers’ when speaking in the vernacular. Plumbers, construction workers and garbage collectors, working informally and belonging to “lower” castes, are the “labour” upon whom the upper-caste middle classes rely to construct, clean and maintain their homes, streets and neighbourhoods. Thus the historically designated ‘labouring classes’ have become the ‘labour class’ whose children are to be found in this classroom. Instead of explicit references to “lower” castes teachers tended to mark their own castes (in conversations with me) and that of upper caste children. Pramod Bhargav and Manish Tiwari often addressed Brahman boys in the classroom as ‘*pandit*’, which

⁸⁵ See chapter 5.

means 'priest' in Hindi and thus signifies the Brahman caste. The name was not used for the Brahmin girls (fieldnotes):

Bhargav sir seems to show more patience with Brahman kids – unless they regularly vex him. He told Pawan today, 'you are a *pandit*'s son, do as *pandits* should.' (18/10/2014)

Pawan was an upper caste boy. Thus, Bhargav sir was marking caste by naming and underscoring the caste of "upper" caste boys. Since it is being "lower" in the caste hierarchy that can be socially stigmatising in India, he avoided marking the castes of "lower" caste students. He seemed to think that as long as he did not name or identify "lower" caste students as such he would not be seen as practicing discrimination. Identifying the upper caste boys as *pandit*, and thus upper caste, was a clever arrangement that served the twin purposes of establishing a caste hierarchy and marking those who belong to the "upper" rungs of this hierarchy.

Such labelling and moral evaluation by teachers constitute 'objectifying practices' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) seeking '[d]isciplinary control and the creation of docile bodies' (ibid: 135) in – and through – classroom discourses. These practices effect disciplinary control at two levels: establishing the relative authorities of teachers and students and the division and ranking of students according to larger social logics. However, as I discuss later in this chapter, this relationship between disciplinary mechanism of the classroom and social relations can become useful when students from socially subordinated groups (like Arif and Bushra, siblings from a Muslim, OBC community) successfully turn themselves into "good" students thus reversing the social hierarchy, at least, within the classroom.

6.2 The disciplinary effects of welfare in the classroom

In this section, I scrutinise caste relationships through an analysis of some of the administrative work that consumes significant amounts of time in the classroom, often also diverting time from teaching. Even Usha Pandey who avoided doing any of her administrative work during Science class lamented the time-consuming work of proving eligibility for, and then disbursing, scholarships; she regretted that this work had not allowed her to focus on "weaker" students at the beginning of the

academic year thus affecting those students' performance all year. Thus, the lack of administrative support in schools and the targeted nature of subsidies produced a scenario where the grants that are ultimately supposed to help students, ended up harming them. One afternoon in the staffroom she expressed frustration with the entire process (fieldnotes written up immediately afterwards):

'Earlier [scholarship] was given so that parents send kids to school out of greed, but now that parents want to educate kids anyway all this drama should be wrapped up.' (08/11/2014)

Thus, she constructed impoverished parents as greedy and welfare benefits as "freebies" used to tap into this "greed" rather than rights and entitlements that emerged from efforts to respond to histories of socioeconomic subjugation. This construction was a refusal of the impact of poverty on a child's access to, and experience of, school; and objectification of poor parents as morally and intellectually incapable of acting in their children's best interests.

I also see these administrative processes as attempts to discipline this historically specific student into being a certain kind of citizen and beneficiary. Raman (1997) and Velaskar (2010) argue that as part of structural adjustment, the neoliberal Indian state has shifted to a compensatory approach from an egalitarian one. This approach has entailed a 'fragmentation of social vision' and a tendency to tackle each fragment in isolation with the others (Raman 197: 3). Consequently, in post-liberalisation India, the number of targeted benefits offered by the central government to students in government schools in 2001-2003 (UNESCO 2015) have risen even as the state withdrew from education (Velaskar 2010). More recently, the Madhya Pradesh state government introduced the '*Samagra Samajik Suraksha* Mission Identification' (Comprehensive Social Security Mission; henceforth, SSSMID) project which entails the collection of massive amounts of information on students and their families in order to 'streamline' and 'rationalise' benefit disbursement. This work took up a disproportionate amount of teaching-learning time and severely disrupted academic work. Significantly, nearly half of the schemes covered under the SSSM⁸⁶ include

⁸⁶ Madhya Pradesh Samagra Samajik Suraksha Mission (Comprehensive Social Security Mission) portal: <http://samagra.gov.in/beta/default.html>. Accessed on: 29/4/2018, 07: 31hrs.

targeted benefits specifically for the Informal Working Class. While welfare is vital to possibilities of social mobility for historically marginalised groups, the targeted nature of benefits and inadequate support staff and infrastructure at schools, lead to teachers and Head Masters resenting the entire project.

Central to the disbursal of benefits under all these schemes was the submission of various documents that would prove the identity and eligibility of beneficiaries, for example, birth certificates, caste-certificate or parents' worker IDs. As discussed in chapter one, obtaining and submitting documents for the purpose of receiving welfare benefits is a particularly complicated facet of civic life in India. In this process, students and/or their families had to learn to negotiate institutions like the school and the local municipal corporation. Not only are original documents to be obtained from the concerned officials, but the requisite number of photocopies of each document, and in some cases, photocopies attested by notaries are also required. For adults with little or no school education the entire process demanded substantial investment of time and money they could barely afford. As a result, on the one hand, students and parents were subjected to multiple reminders and even rebukes; and on the other, teachers had to spend a lot of time completing the entire process. Students were known to even skip school if they had been issued multiple reminders and their parents were still struggling to obtain the required documents. The following fieldnotes show the practices involved in negotiating the process of submitting documents and obtaining benefits at school:

Manish Tiwari asked students for Xerox copies of parents' Ration Card. [...] He also told me about all the different categories for which he has to submit data [to the state]: Above Poverty Line, Below Poverty Line, SC, ST, gender. (11/11/2014)

Prabha Shinde said, 'An order has come from above that everyone's caste certificates must be readied [...] 'You don't have time, your parents don't have time, we have a lot of time! [...] She then listed all the names of the kids who had yet to submit their caste certificates. She also hit Raviraj and others, commenting: 'No matter how much you are hit, scolded, it doesn't make a difference!' [...] And recapitulated the sources and processes for obtaining of caste certificate. (16/10/2014)

Manish Tiwari showed everyone Dipali's⁸⁷ caste certificate; she had had the Hindi and English copies of the document laminated. Showed it to me as well. (09/01/2015)

These fieldnotes reveal the rituals and practices entailed in the process of proving one's eligibility for, and obtaining, welfare benefits. For their part, teachers regularly did the following: remind students to complete the administrative work; record details of individual students and benefits disbursed; read out lists of students who needed to submit documents or collect benefits; read out lists of documents required; and lecture students and parents for delays. Appreciation – in this case, for Dipali – was also an objectifying practice that 'divided' students into "good" and "bad" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Elaborate records on each student and her family resulted in individuation and a particular kind of knowledge of this individual (ibid): as a student (responsible, capable, obedient and punctual or not) and as a citizen (age, family income, previous educational record).

Beyond the school, obtaining documents required parents to pay bribes (Arif (OBC), Rahul Subhash (SC)) to access information, get forms completed and deal with officials (Dilip (SC), Arif), that is, to develop specific symbolic and material relationships with the state and its institutions. Thus as part of this process students learn *to know* (which documents are required to identify themselves) and *be known* (how to use these documents). Foucault's conceptualisation of power/knowledge relations underscores precisely this *simultaneity* of objectifying and subjectifying practices in a given institutional context (ibid, Foucault 1977).

Moreover, informal working class students' and parents' negotiation of a relationship with the state becomes enmeshed with their negotiation of a relationship with teachers. Even apart from the 'political instrument' of material 'need' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 112) I suggest that teachers' moral and institutional authority in the classroom plays an important role in shaping parents' and students' response to the demanding process of proving eligibility for welfare schemes. Thus the disciplinary practices associated with moral policing by teachers play a significant role in incorporating the marginalised student into a system of

⁸⁷ Dipali belongs to SC community.

education and simultaneously (and through it) a system of governance⁸⁸. Kumar notes that the institutions of the colonial state were 'all educational agencies of the empir[e]' (Kumar 2005/2013: 26). Historical access to these institutions and corresponding official documents and bureaucratic mechanisms have allowed groups privileged on the basis of caste and class to be more completely *educated* in the ways of the state. I suggest that differential level of comfort with state institutions is another aspect of the class- and/or caste-based differences between teachers and students. Thus the moral agenda in the classroom entailed not only certain habits, attributes and values but a certain relationship between IWC and/or non-dominant caste groups' and state institutions and bureaucratic processes.

Lastly, I argue that through the very fact of these welfare schemes and the disciplinary practices entailed in their implementation in/through schools, a 'market rationality' characterised by targeted welfare, the withdrawal of the state and the informalisation and lowering of wages, is being legitimated. Not only were students', parents' and teachers' time, energy and effort being regulated through these administrative processes, but a message was also being conveyed to IWC students about im/possibilities of welfare: the price of their "welfare" is the time taken away from teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Scholarships were meant to address social and economic injustices emerging from historical oppression of groups based on gender, class and caste, for example, there were scholarship schemes for students from SC and ST backgrounds, girls who had lost their fathers as well as for the more impoverished students among General Category (upper caste) students. Thus, terming welfare schemes, 'freebies', also elides these histories and their implications for a student's success in and through education. Secondly, socioeconomic locations also shaped the ability of individual families to access benefits; among the beneficiary groups only those parents managed to obtain certificates with relatively less trouble who could afford to take some time off and/or had the experience of dealing with urban institutions. For example, Raviraj's (SC) parents found it very difficult to take time off work whereas

⁸⁸ Term used in its narrow sense, not the Foucauldian one.

Dipali – who was also Dalit – was the only student I came across whose father had held a government job (police constable) and that experience would have helped him complete the paper work relatively more easily. The very histories of injustice that necessitated scholarships also often dictated that the beneficiaries will have a harder time trying to fulfil requirements for proving eligibility.

6.3 Keeping clean: discipline of the mind, body and spirit

This section interrogates teachers' focus on hygiene and cleanliness which extended, in different forms, from children's bodies to their minds and spirits and was usually framed in a Hindu religious and spiritual language. In the previous chapter I discussed the nature and extent of bodily discipline demanded in the classroom. Even Usha Pandey and Jyoti Gupta, whose classes students rarely disrupted, usually did not allow students to go to the toilet. Thus, 'the division of time' was a significant mechanism of (Alam 2013: 235) implementing 'physical discipline [...] concerned with the creation of docile bodies' (Froerer 2007: 1053). In addition, Pramod Bhargav often corrected students on the way they stood in the morning assembly, sat in the classroom, or approached teachers. That is, [s]tudents' movements and gestures were under constant surveillance and as Alam (2013: 237) notes, the objective is 'to increase the mastery of each individual over his own body.'

Further, Pramod Bhargav and Jyoti Gupta also stressed the discipline of the mind and the spirit. For example, during a class on Hindi poems by famous saints given by Pramod Bhargav I jotted down the following:

Bhargav sir stressing obedience. Also *dhyan* (attention) and focus. Making fun of mothers: that they think of everything else when sitting for *Vaishali* (prayers). [...] Brought in Narendra Modi⁸⁹; stressed his austerity and the

⁸⁹ Narendra Modi has been the Prime Minister of India since May 2014. He has popularly been seen as a determined leader who would work tirelessly for India's development. The narrative of his charisma and political success is constructed partly around the story of his humble origins (a tea-seller from an OBC group) and hard work. He belongs to the right-wing nationalist, Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and is also seen by critics as a communally polarising figure.

value of obedience. [...] Also at some level, submission to absent authority and hierarchies. (22/09/2014)

Kumar (2013: 35) notes about the colonial education system in India that there was a 'resonance that the emphasis on moral development in the colonial discourse had in an indigenously Indian discourse on education.' The latter was largely part of a 'Brahmanical tradition' that places great value on asceticism i.e. 'renounc[ing] of the ordinary course of life' and 'the sacrifice of [one's] own ordinary urges during the course of youth.' Similarly, Froerer (2007: 1067) points out that 'there exists an insidious 'banal Hinduism' in government' schools. Teachers like Jyoti Gupta and Pramod Bhargav often referred, in their conversations, to a strong personal belief system that was rooted in a Brahmanical religious and spiritual ethos. Thus, teachers may be perfectly genuine in their beliefs and value systems; nor is religious belief a problem in itself. But when it is used to morally police and evaluate others it may bear scrutiny. Problems arise when, one, all students are expected to be religious or spiritual and two, when everyone is expected to be able to relate to the same set of beliefs in a context as tremendously diverse as India. It is especially problematic given that large sections of students from historically marginalised groups are entering schools for the first time in India and a majority of these students are the social "others" of their teachers in terms of caste, religion and class. Jyoti Gupta also tended to use emotional-moral pressure to get students to learn (fieldnotes):

Jyoti Gupta singled out some students – Shweta (UC), Raviraj (SC), Taruna (SC), Dipali (SC), Sharada (OBC) and said: 'If you have any shame, if you at all respect teacher, or mother and father then memorise it and come tomorrow.' (30/11/2014)

On another occasion, Jyoti Gupta gave a long lecture in the classroom; based on fieldnote extracts below I argue that the way various components of upper caste, middle class moral sensibilities came together in her talk may help establish all these components as being morally significant and equally so for the students. At the beginning of the lecture Manish Tiwari and Prabha Shinde were also present and all three teachers had lectured students on everything from working hard for tests to generally facing problems in life. I am quoting Jyoti Gupta's words from my fieldnotes:

'[You] must also attend to internal hygiene' / '[Give up] *gutka, paan*, other addictive substances – a campaign is being run for these as well. You are

just children, if you develop addictions now...' / 'You... If your papa does something, you should get him to stop using as well.' / 'Out of twenty-four hours, give half an hour to God. Whoever you believe in, I've told you thousands of times, take out half an hour, do introspection, 'what bad habits do I have?'' / She called out some names: 'Mayank (UC), Pawan (UC), and [...] also if there are other children who have any addictions, get rid of them.' (01/11/2014)

Encouraging them to tell on each other in the matter of drug-use Jyoti Gupta continued (fieldnotes):

'Mahesh (OBC) why aren't you getting the (school) dress stitched?' / Jyoti Gupta lectured Pawan specifically that he's a good boy and is here to study, that he shouldn't get mad at the guy who told on him...(raised her voice) 'Pawan! Touch your parents' feet every day! Nobody does that! Why should you? You go to temples and bow before gods. But not before those who gave you birth!' (01/11/2014)

Touching the feet of those older to one is a Hindu custom⁹⁰. Through such everyday cultural references Jyoti Gupta often linked (Hindu) religiosity with personal hygiene and well-being. She simultaneously sought to construct impoverished parents as irresponsible adults who cannot guide their children and instead need teachers' and school-going children's "guidance" to "correct" themselves.

On 15 October 2014 the state government celebrated *hath dhulai diwas* (hand-washing day) in an effort to create awareness of the need to wash hands in order to prevent various infections.⁹¹ This state focus on hygiene as an exercise in improving

⁹⁰ For example, in Islam bowing to any person or thing other than Allah is considered irreligious.

⁹¹The idea was to create a world record by having a large number of students wash hands at the same time in schools across the country. The feat had been attempted previously in other third world countries.

1. <http://sanitation.indiawaterportal.org/hindi/node/4061>. Accessed on: 27 Feb 2017 (21:08hrs).
2. <http://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/hindi/hindusthan+samachar+hindi-epaper-hshind/vishv+hath+dhulai+divas+15+ko+skulo+me+kiya+jaega+pradarshan-newsid-45197644>. Accessed on: 27 Feb 2017, 21:10hrs.
3. <https://khabar.ndtv.com/news/india/guinness-book-recognises-mps-world-record-in-washing-hands-777992>. Accessed on: 27 Feb 2018, 21:11hrs.

https://hi.nhp.gov.in/%E0%A4%B5%E0%A5%88%E0%A4%B6%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%95-%E0%A4%B9%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A5-%E0%A4%A7%E0%A5%81%E0%A4%B2%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%88-%E0%A4%A6%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%B5%E0%A4%B8_pg. Accessed on: 27 Feb 2018, 21:10hrs. The link to this webpage was in Hindi and when copy pasted into a

community health provided an appropriate context for lecture on health and hygiene to “labour class” children. In the girls’ case these lectures became even more accusatory and at times, undignified. During an interview with some boys Jyoti Gupta joined us and when we tried to speak of “safer” topics like water shortage during summer she began to speak of girls’ lack of hygiene:

‘Just yesterday or day before I rebuked the girls, ‘one mug of water and that’s it!’ They are not used to keeping clean. Same habits at their homes too: will just use water left from washing clothes [in the toilet]. I stressed a lot that they should really keep everything clean... [That will] help avoid many diseases.’ (28/01/2015)

Thus the IWC girls in the classroom, most of whom belonged to non-dominant castes, were being constructed as unclean and uncaring of hygienic practices. In one of my first group interviews with the girls which also happened outside the classroom (November 2014) girls reported a recent lecture by Jyoti Gupta on the matter of sanitary cloths and their disposal. During that interview Nilofar (Muslim, OBC) introduced the topic but was too embarrassed to repeat the teacher’s words and ultimately, Prachi (UC) narrated the incident:

Prachi: Jyoti teacher had said that any girl who has it, you know, that is,... the cloth is there *na*, that *na*, is thrown anywhere so teacher had said, ‘that cloth and stuff you all use, now you keep it somewhere with you, or throw in the dustbin...’ So she had said that ‘should I look into each girl’s underwear?’

Nilofar (giggling helplessly): Everyone’s head was down, and I was trying so hard not to laugh!

I suggest that part of the reason the upper-caste woman teacher was so incensed and used such language can be traced to the ideas of ritual purity in Brahmanical patriarchy and the injunctions to maintain a ritual distance from menstrual blood and menstruating girls (Chakravarti 1993). However, this is no justification of such an attitude to adolescent girls, especially since they lacked sanitary facilities both at school and home. A reason some of the teachers freely used undignified language at times, could also be that ‘labour class’ (a term that combines references to both caste and class locations of students, as discussed earlier) students were not seen

document, it looks like this. It was a page on the Indian government’s National Health Portal.

as deserving the dignity that middle class students might. Usha Pandey was a most remarkable exception in her unfailingly dignified treatment of all her students. The indignity of such lectures becomes even more untenable given the fact that there was no separate facility to wash and dry, or dispose off, cloth napkins at school. At home, several families had to share bathroom facilities with neighbours and sometimes lacked adequate plumbing and other infrastructure in the toilets. Given these circumstances, some of the women teachers' vocal disapproval of girls and their families also precluded girl students from seeking help and guidance from women teachers. For example, when Bushra (Muslim, OBC) first began to menstruate she was at the school and instead of requesting a sanitary napkin from one of the women teachers she tore off a piece of the dirty, dusty, coarse mat they sat on and used that. Bushra's relating this incident to Nilofar became the latter's first lesson on the fact of menstruation. During fieldwork I noticed that when Radha began her periods in school, the blood seeped through her clothes and the mat on which she was sitting and eventually stained the floor. Yet the girl did not find it possible to approach any of the four women teachers in the school. Teachers either did not talk about reproductive health and hygiene or the ones who did used language that only embarrassed the girls. At a time when sanitary napkins have been taxed as luxury items in Indian's new tax regime (introduced in 2017), the issue of reproductive health and underprivileged adolescent girls' dignity and ability to take care of themselves assume even greater urgency.

As the foregoing discussion shows, narratives of bodily, spiritual and mental cleanliness and discipline significantly shape classroom texts and practices. Froerer (2007: 1053) argues that the agenda of discipline is 'devoid of any obvious ideological content' and is driven solely by concerns around learning and academic success. I find that the picture is more complex than that and the interplay of individual teachers' beliefs, teachers' relative authority vis. a vis. students and the institutionalization of dominant belief systems results in a narrative of discipline that seeks to construct students as morally deficient genderclasted subjects. This narrative of moral evaluation/disciplining is intimately and intricately linked with that of intellectual evaluation (interrogated in chapter 5); and thus moral-intellectual hierarchies become a fundamental aspect of classroom texts and processes.

6.4 Policing space, clothes and relationships

In this section I discuss disciplining strategies used specifically to regulate gender relations and images in the classroom. It must be remembered that within the larger logic of Brahmanical patriarchy in the Indian context, a primary imperative for the maintenance of gender relations and order continues to come from the need to maintain the caste order. The social rules that seek to regulate gender roles and relations derive fundamentally from the notion of endogamy (discussed in chapter two) and articulate the need for guarding girls as the gatekeepers of caste borders and divisions. In this section I show that in addition to their casteist underpinnings these disciplinary strategies were used to explicitly discipline some of the Dalit girls far more than the rest of the girls in the classroom. The first of the strategies used to subject girls to logics of Brahmanical patriarchy was the school uniform; the second was organization of space (Bhattacharjee 1999) and the third was an explicit monitoring and active discouragement of real or perceived attraction, or romantic relationships, between boys and girls.

The school uniform for girls in middle school was the *kurta-salwar* and the *dupattah* draped in a 'V' carefully covering adolescent girls' developing breasts⁹². Girls were required to pin the *dupattah* to the *kurta* in at either shoulder and secure the tip of the V with a third safety pin. A missing safety pin required clever tactics to avoid the teacher's eye. For example, one day Anita (OBC) explained to me that she had been wearing the sweater over her *kurta* and *dupattah* all day in order to hide the fact that she had forgotten to put in the third pin. Similarly, girls' hairstyles were also severely policed; while the difference between boys' and girls' uniforms can be laid down at the door of patriarchal worldviews, in general, I found that the insistence on being dressed correctly for school was also a result of teachers wishing to have their students and school be seen by society as "good" (Froerer 2007).

⁹² While low fee private schools that students from similar backgrounds attend in the area have skirt and blouse as prescribed uniform for girls, across the country, both private and government schools can be quite conservative when it comes to young girls' bodies.

Before and during school functions girls were subjected to special instructions and scrutiny, particularly by Jyoti Gupta. Following is an extract from fieldnotes on what Jyoti Gupta said to the children in on Children's Day⁹³:

'You were given freedom to wear civil [dress] so you have come all nicely dressed in *salwar*-suit. Even if [you are] wearing jeans, [you are] wearing it properly. There are one or two who have made a mistake so you explain it to them. All the others are wearing nice clothes – both boys and girls. There is only one thing – don't let your hair lie loose. Plait it when you go out. When you are grown up it may be fine not to tie your hair up. Now you are only in sixth, seventh [standard]...you are young...then you have to be out on the street *na*, alone, right...' (14/10/2014)

Such instructions proved particularly frustrating for girls like Renuka (OBC), Prachi (UC), Rashmi (SC) and Chhaya (SC) who had much greater freedom to dress as they pleased at home. In addition, as Nilofar (Muslim, OBC) complained during an interview, girl students also tended to taunt any girl among them who forgot her dupattah or failed to wear it correctly. Here my findings echo Alam's (2013: 237) observation that: 'Students' movements and gestures are under constant surveillance, if not from the madrasa authorities teachers, then from within the students themselves.' In this classroom such surveillance by classmates was also a result of teachers cultivating some students as "informers" who monitored and reported on others. This was clear from Dipali (SC), Roopa (OBC), Bindu (OBC) and Rani's (ST) conversations (they repeated Jyoti Gupta's comments on other girls):

Dipali: Madam (referring to Jyoti Gupta) now thinks that everyone is flying high, everyone's grown wings. (The Hindi equivalent of 'growing wings' has negative connotations meaning that someone is doing something they did not dare do earlier.)

Bindu: If from our class... even two or three girls turn out to be like this then...

Dipali: Yes...

Bindu: ... then entire class will earn a bad name.

The idea of chastity and the consequent control over sexuality through policing girls' movements, dress, social-interactions come from the historical upper caste focus on

⁹³ 14 November; to mark the birth anniversary of independent India's first Prime Minister, Pandit J L Nehru.

women's chastity (Chakravarti 1993). Thus an upper caste worldview has become institutionalized through the notion of the "good (girl) student" in the classroom. Interestingly, the girls, Dipali (SC), Roopa (OBC) and Rani (ST), who regularly informed Jyoti Gupta's about their classmates' relationships, habits and conversations do not belong to the upper caste; that is, '(upper) caste' and '(middle) class' appear as attitudes here, rather than as socioeconomic locations. Herein lies the problem with the institutionalization of historically dominant norms in and through formal education. This is also why disciplinary and subjectivating practices and moments need to be interrogated; such an interrogation allows one to unpack the ways in which larger social relations are sought to be reproduced – and contested on a daily basis. (Re)production of gendercaste relations in/through education is not a simple matter of individual locations and a continuation of historical power relations; rather, considerable effort is required in order to maintain and reproduce certain relations. A nuanced understanding of power relations as opposed to an essentialising one allows scholars and practitioners to disrupt the myriad processes of (re)production of social injustices and reimagine education. While the moral policing of real or perceived relationships between girls and boys is not limited to classrooms populated by IWC students, it is important to understand the effects of this moral policing in co

njunction with those of the class-caste based intellectual evaluation of IWC students in general.

A particularly problematic feature of the moral discourse exemplified in the above excerpt was its construction of girl students as representing the "honour" of the class reminding one of the way honour is used as a trope to contain and regulate female sexuality within families and communities (Chakravarti 1993, 1998; Amin 1995). This meant that interaction between girls and boys in the classroom was also heavily policed by some teachers. Part of the reason behind this feverish policing was, perhaps, the fact that this was the first year that girls and boys were in the same classroom in this middle school. As Pramod Bhargav once remarked with reference to the need to "control" and manage classrooms:

'In co-ed [classrooms] there shouldn't be more than thirty, thirty-five [students]...'

This sentiment was expressed by almost every other teacher at some point or the other. However, many teachers failed to realise that students also found it difficult to negotiate this transition to a coeducational classroom. It is easy to see that the social constraints and disciplinary practices discussed in chapter four were important factors behind this difficulty; unfortunately, texts and practices in the classroom did nothing to resolve it even though as the following conversation with Dilip (SC) and Dilshad (OBC) shows, it affected students' motivation and ability to engage with teaching:

Reva: According to you should girls and boys have one class or separate ones?

Both together: Separate.

Dilshad: If [classes are] separate, it will be better.

Reva (sounding puzzled): Everyone in the class is saying the same thing. Why?

Dilip: Because it gets so crowded there's no place to sit.

Reva: Then it's also possible to have 40 in each class and have 20 girls and 20 boys. Would that be okay?

Dilip (sounding less sure): Yeah that will also be okay...

Reva: So, you don't have any problems with girls?

Dilip: Girls should be in a separate section.

Reva: Why?

Dilip: Boys aren't all that nice.

Reva: That...oh, *that* is the reason you are saying this?

Dilip: No, like if it's boys, then getting scolded in front of boys is okay. The way people think is...they say that if he asks the teacher [something] he will be humiliated in front of girls.

Reva: So that's how girls think too, you know!

Dilip: Yes, that's what!

Dilshad: Girls too don't want ...in front of boys...

Dilip: If a girl is scolded in front of other girls, that's okay. But [she] won't stand in front of boys [in the classroom].

Reva: Why?

Dilip: Like, that's it, that's how these people figure it...

Reva: You laugh more at girls? Or at boys? Tell me about yourselves, forget other people...

Dilshad: At girls...

Reva: Why?

Dilip: No...not like that with us, [we] laugh equally – if it's boys then we laugh at boys, if it's to do with girls, [we] laugh at girls...

Some boys had also told me that though they were very passionate about singing and dancing they felt shy performing in front of girls and thus never participated in school functions. Most boys and girls also negotiated this nervousness of the “other” and humiliation, in general, in gendered ways in the classroom: while boys chose to brazen it out by laughing at themselves girls chose not to answer. Teachers did not help this situation when about three months into the academic year they decided to use enforced proximity as a punitive strategy (fieldnotes from Prabha Shinde's class):

Girls, boys [have been sat] next to each other – as a deterrent to too much talk. / Shinde madam is highlighting that boys are [the girls'] brothers. / This brother-sister relationship seems to be the only way children can be taught to relate to each other. (20/09/2014)

Though this strategy may have backfired. I saw girls and boys visibly relaxing around each other as the year progressed. As they borrowed pens, textbooks and water bottles both began to lose their distrust of the other and hostilities began to turn into grudging acceptance and even friendships. Yet, the policing had other effects: I suggest that one of the reasons students, especially girls, refused to approach teachers for help in academic or other matters was the systematic moral policing. In addition to the lectures on the inadequacy of their efforts and engagement with studies⁹⁴, the frequent admonitions on dress and movement would have the effect of distancing most girls from their women teachers⁹⁵. When she found it necessary, Jyoti Gupta was also known to call up parents and complain about their children's academic performance or other behaviour; this was particularly scary for girls. As discussed previously in the thesis, many girls' access to school was also contingent upon the “propriety” of their behavior; that is, any complaints from a teacher could easily jeopardise their schooling, in addition to leading to unpleasantness at home.

⁹⁴ In chapter 5 I have detailed the way students were reprovved by their teachers for not making adequate academic effort.

⁹⁵ The men teachers did not directly comment on ant girls' dress or behaviour; at the most, they would report anything they found “objectionable” to a woman teacher.

Since many girls spoke of being kept under surveillance by a number of family members they would have keenly felt the pressure to avoid being reported for any reason to their family by teachers. As I have also shown in this chapter and chapter 5, some teachers' speech and practices tended to reflect class and caste biases which often combined with patriarchal biases in the girls' case and produced narratives that served to distance most girls from their teachers. While some girls negotiated this othering through their high performance in exams and classroom (e.g., Nilofar), others negotiated it through appropriating the same disciplinary narrative as their teachers (e.g., Dipali and Roopa); yet others sought to negotiate it through efforts to avoid attracting teachers' attention.

What might have helped the students was for, at least, some of their teachers to also problematize dominant narratives around gender images and relations. However, it was rare for a teacher to challenge patriarchal norms and worldviews. Usha Pandey was the only one to specifically create the opportunity to talk about girls' rights and conditions and even she spoke only on Children's Day⁹⁶. In her speech to the children she said the following (excerpts from her speech):

'gender-based discrimination should be eradicated... if there is no daughter then where will we find daughters-in-law in the society? Where will we bring mothers from? For education also... we need to encourage daughters a lot too (the children clapped)...when you grow up you should end this discrimination in your house.... If you respect women, definitely our society will be a lot better. (More clapping).

However, while Usha Pandey's speech to the students was an annual event, the policing and shaming to which Jyoti Gupta and Prabha Shinde subjected the girls, were daily ones. As conversations with a number of students revealed, faced with such debilitating codes of conduct both boys and girls struggled to find a language in which to talk about romantic or sexual interest and relationships. Such relationships were so deeply entrenched as something "wrong" that imagining non-judgmental terms for naming and discussing attraction, desire or love seemed nearly impossible in our conversations. Such texts and practices in the classroom further the interests

⁹⁶ As explained in chapter five, Children's Day was a special occasion and various events were organised to mark the day.

of endogamy (Chakravarti 2009a) in a society that is witnessing systematic, widespread and aggressive public propaganda against interfaith and intercaste marriages.

6.4.1 Dalit girls

Not all teachers paid equal attention to the interaction between girls and boys, or policed girls' dress and movement with equal severity. Manish Tiwari and Usha Pandey rarely commented on these things; Usha Pandey felt that some attraction and infatuation for 'the opposite sex' was to be expected in adolescence and it was best to just let children be. However, Pramod Bhargav, Jyoti Gupta spent more than half of their time in the classroom lecturing their students; Prabha Shinde was less severe and frequent in her criticisms than these two teachers but she also found most of her students' actions and attitudes problematic as reflected in the harsh rebukes she issued every once in a while.

Anyone refusing to adhere to the gendered code of conduct prescribed by Pramod Bhargav and/or Jyoti Gupta was likely to invite even greater scrutiny from these teachers. Some of the boys had also been subjected to scrutiny by the two teachers and had commented on it during an interview. However, it was two of the Dalit girls, Rashmi and Chhaya (they were first cousins and lived close to each other), who bore the brunt of this scrutiny. I suggest that since they tried to subvert the objectifying logic of Brahmanical patriarchy in which they were enmeshed, they were subjected to much greater policing and humiliation in the classroom by the two teachers. One conversation between me, Chhaya and some others offers an example of how Pramod Bhargav humiliated her; in this case, she was accused by the teacher of being interested in a couple of boys in the class:

Chhaya: Were you here the day when Bhargav sir...someone...had said something to me? [...] Then *na*, you know that Ritu⁹⁷, right, [...] she was reading out of her book very loudly so I turned to look at her, so sir said, 'this girl, why are you looking over your shoulder? [Are you] looking at

⁹⁷ Ritu was from an OBC community.

Mahesh or Namit⁹⁸? You know what Namit said... So, I ...hmm, so I told him that, 'sir *ji* I am not looking at anyone'. So you know, Namit jumped in, and said, 'sir *ji*, not me, she was looking at Mahesh'... So I told my mother the whole thing, so mummy said, 'this time I didn't say anything but, till today... [It's been] six years since I came to this school, [but I] never went to complain about anyone... nothing...', I said, 'yes'. So [mummy] said 'now if a second time [Bhargav sir] says such wrong things *na*, you tell me'.

This was treatment to which no other girl in the classroom was subjected. In a social context where interaction with, or interest in, boys is so heavily policed these were serious accusations that could affect a girl's social standing in and beyond the classroom. Kannabiran and Kannabiran (1991) note that historically the Dalit woman has been constructed as being 'available' and as being 'public' as opposed to the upper caste woman whose chastity was highly valued and was ensured by severely restricting their freedom of movement and visibility in the public sphere. Chhaya and Rashmi were friendly with some of the boys in the classroom with whom they interacted freely and openly. Jyoti Gupta and Pramod Bhargav disapproved of these friendships. I suggest that it was not only that the girls had challenged these two teachers' worldview but that they were Dalit. The two teachers also disapproved of the behavior of an upper caste girl in the classroom (they talked about it in the staffroom), but the girl was never shamed in the classroom. Secondly, other Dalit girls in the classroom also remained under these teachers' radar as they stuck to most of the rules of the classroom, especially in terms of interaction with boys. But Rashmi and Chhaya's unapologetic and enthusiastic presence in the public sphere of the school and their unconventional worldview troubled the two teachers (Jyoti Gupta refrained from singling the girls out for shaming in the classroom but discussed them with individual students and in the staffroom). It is precisely this change in the composition of the public sphere, the classroom, that I suggest bothers some caste Hindu teachers. As Kannabiran and Kannabiran (*ibid*) argue, caste dynamics and (renewed) aggression against Dalit women and communities needs to be understood in the context of these socioeconomic shifts.

⁹⁸ Mahesh belonged to an OBC group and Namit to a SC community.

Pramod Bhargav also systematically and specifically tried to show Rashmi up as a “bad”/“weak” student even as he policed her dress and appearance (field notes):

Pramod Bhargav goes after Rashmi very often. Almost every day he asks her something. Today she was reproached for wearing a wide bracelet. / ‘What are you wearing on your wrist?’ / ‘We have to come simply dressed here, to school. It isn’t a fashion parade. If you forgot to take it off when leaving for school you could have kept it in your bag?’ (05/12/2014)

He would ask her factual questions like ‘what district is Maheshwar in?’ and make fun of her responses. Perhaps, like many other students she did not know her Geography well and I suggest she also became flustered because of the way these two teachers monitored, and commented on, everything she did and said. Moreover, in his position as a teacher Pramod Bhargav was reinforcing caste-based hierarchies in two distinct ways: one, by publicly harassing two of the Dalit girl students and two, by misrepresenting contemporary and historical narratives of caste in India as I show later in this chapter and in chapter 7.

6.5 Constructing the “Muslim other”

Lastly, I turn to some of the experiences of Muslim students in this classroom. In the context of these students, the moral curriculum focused on: a) the question of purity/impurity as it related to food, that is, the question of vegetarianism versus non-vegetarianism; b) cow-slaughter and c) the (justifiable) violence that ensued as a result of Muslims’ meat-eating. It was mentioned in chapter 3 that there were only seven Muslim students, two of whom were boys and the rest, girls. None of the students seemed willing to speak explicitly about the way students or teachers mocked non-vegetarianism and the communal underpinnings of such discursive practice. However, some of them did speak and/or hint at narratives of communal violence, propaganda and othering in their neighbourhoods as well as among classmates. In the thesis, I have often used Arif’s interviews rather than the others’ because he spoke of difference consistently, spoke at length and was more articulate than the others (all the while avoiding speaking about teachers and classmates).

This school also had its share of Hindu Brahmanical cultural references: pictures and idols of Hindu deities, the *Saraswati Vandana* sung during morning assembly and special occasions and frequent references to Hindu religious practices by some of the teachers. As discussed in chapter 5, cultural differences between many students from non-dominant castes and teachers were also manifested in the former's patterns of language use. Secondly, a range of other deities (*Sheetla mata*, *Bheru baba*, *Patla baba*) worshipped locally by non-dominant caste groups also did not find mention in the everyday life of school. However, except Pramod Bhargav no other teacher systematically demarcated perceived differences and binary opposition between "Hindu" and "Muslim" students. I never observed Prabha Shinde and Usha Pandey referring to religion or even the notion of a god or theism in the classroom.

Prabha Shinde was vehemently vegetarian and upper caste but her views on these things were never verbalised in the classroom. She discussed her beliefs in the staff room; for example, once during lunch break she informed us, she used to put a black mark using a piece of charcoal on her husband's steel lunch-box to deflect the "evil" eye of non-vegetarian young men in the neighbourhood. Pramod Bhargav also disapproved of non-vegetarianism though he did not make explicit references to eating habits in the classroom except when it was discussed in the Hindi textbook. In the staff room, he discussed it more often. For example, one afternoon he brought up the issue of leather factories and killing of animals (fieldnotes on the conversation):

Bhargav sir said, Calcutta⁹⁹ is India's dirtiest city, there are leather factories there. And that cleaning the Ganga, cleaning Calcutta and Benares is necessary. Manish Tiwari added his assent to these statements.
(24/09/2014)

When vegetarianism came up in the textbook in a lesson on Gandhi's life in colonial South Africa he spoke in tones of admiration of Gandhi's refusal to partake of non-vegetarian food; he also did not make any effort to discourage students from mocking non-vegetarianism (field notes):

⁹⁹ Officially, the city is called 'Kolkata'.

There were groans when Bhargav sir read out that Gandhi was advised to become a non-vegetarian...not many but a few loud ones with Amrit caricaturing meat-eating offensively. (11/10/2014)

He tended to use his position and authority as a language teacher to regularly and systematically try and distinguish Hindi from Urdu and English and establish Hindi as “our” language and India as the land of Hindi and Hindus. He did not directly refer to Muslims as “others” and “outsiders”; instead, he used to link Urdu to Mughal rule and referred to Mughal rulers as “foreigners” and then link Muslim students to the knowledge of Urdu (field notes):

Hindi class: Bhargav sir saying that English and Urdu words have been accepted as they are – in “our” language. / “our language Hindi”. / He has happily conveyed that language and religions [are essentially linked] – linked “devout Muslim” (*pakka musalman*) and correct pronunciation of Urdu. (24/09/2014)

One day Pramod Bhargav asked if anyone in the classroom knew what the Urdu word for ‘praying’ was. The teacher then asked four or five non-Muslim students some of whom provided the right word, but he only accepted it as the correct answer when Arif (OBC), a Muslim student, offered it. I suggest that in keeping with his essentialisation of the link between religion and language (Hindu-Hindi, Muslims-Urdu), he wanted to show that only Muslim students could have the knowledge of Urdu. Muslims who did not know Urdu, or Hindus who did, were to be erased from the picture so it could fit the ideal situation in a “Hindu” nation. Such efforts to essentialise religious identities as “pure”/unmixed (Saigol 1994) by distorting historically and locally specific realities of various religious-caste communities are very harmful given the penetration of right-wing cultural and political forces in Indore. For example, almost all the students to whom I spoke knew of the RSS branches (*shakha*) and activities; many boys had attended the *shakhas* at some point and some had also attended RSS camps; fathers or brothers of many girls had also attended the *shakhas*.

Mayank (one of the UC ‘*pandit*’ kids) and Rahul Singh (UC) were the most vocal Hindutva supporters in the classroom though some other students also mocked non-vegetarianism (both genders and across caste groups) and saw Muslims as cow-killers. About a week after the episode mentioned above Mayank kept bothering Arif (OBC, Muslim) during English class (fieldnotes taken during the episode):

Mayank called Arif “mutton”. When I asked he replied that Arif ate up all ‘our’ (Mayank’s) cows! I asked how he knew that. Mayank said: ‘I went to his house once and his sister was eating meat’ [and that] Arif has come from Pakistan. Yesterday Mayank called Dilshad *kasai* (butcher). (30/09/2014)

Further, the overall moral curriculum of the school needs to be unpacked in the context of the larger Hindutva rhetoric in the city (discussed in chapters one and four). While the school walls sported verses and proverbs on the need for young people to keep free of bad habits like drinking and drug-use, these same messages formed part of a larger Hindutva set of commandments when one stepped out of the school. Graffiti across the city talked of hanging the killers of the ‘cow mother’ (‘gau mata ke hatyaron ko faansi do!’) and admonished children to stay away from non-vegetarian food and alcohol. Thus, across physical spaces the same broader discourse is emphasised while ensuring that the overtly “neutral” character of school as an institution is maintained. An example of how a variety of messages come together in a person and space-time can be seen in my interview with Rahul Singh who was very familiar with RSS activities through his friends and planned to join the shakhas and camps next year. In this interview with reference to graffiti around the city he said:

Rahul Singh: These cows shouldn’t be killed. It’s written *na*, whoever...whoever has killed cows...killed *gaai-mata* (cow mother) should be sentenced to death. / Like Muslims kills “our” cows right? Muslims kill and eat them [...] once they ate and there was curfew in Ganga Nagar [...] was in the papers. There was a curfew. There was lot of fighting.

After some more discussion in a similar vein of how popular media had reported on Muslim efforts to destroy Hindu shrines and kill cows. During one interview, Rahul Singh declared:

Rahul Singh: [There] should be riots and all – we’ll also go, with swords, will slash Muslims and come back...

This is the boy who had in the same interview expressed anguish at an ant’s death:

Rahul Singh: An ant got killed by my pen...it’s so fragile anyway...

Then he had carefully picked up the body of the dead ant and put it outside the window with great care. He had also described his efforts to do housework in his mother’s absence and to take care of her:

Rahul Singh: I mop and sweep..../ Mummy says before leaving 'take care of some housework...' / when Mummy comes back from work *na*, I don't know how to make *rotis* so I make however I can and feed her / press her hands and legs some times.

Clearly, while students are capable of offering care and empathy, their worldviews also reflect aspects of the dominant right wing discourse in the city which encourage persecution of the communal "other". In view of the social and political environment in Indore and many other parts of India, it becomes important to scrutinise classroom discourses around religion, food habits and othering; and how local, institutional and national discourses impinge upon classroom texts and practices. Thus, in addition to the moral policing that takes place as a result of genderclaste relations, religious difference also forms an important dimension of the moral curriculum in this classroom. It is important to remember that moral agendas are not simply being imposed by teachers on students in any given classroom; rather, the moral curriculum is shaped by larger social and political processes and is negotiated and (re)produced through the active engagement of both teachers and students.

6.6 Subjectivation: students making sense of difference

In this section I unpack students' perspectives on difference and the way they made sense of it. Such an interrogation of students' efforts and investments in relating to each other across difference show that there is a range of ways of being in the classroom and these entail an ongoing contestation and negotiation of dominant social-relations. A lack of stability does not imply that there is equal possibility for every student to affect classroom discourses, or to the same degree. However, focus on contestation and negotiation, that is, on how power relations are sought to be un/'fix'ed yields possibilities and agendas for change and critique arising out of everyday practices. Such a focus also reminds us that situations, social relations, power structures and subjectivities are in process and can be used to imagine and work for a different kind of institution, that is, for challenging the police logic (dissensus).

6.6.1 Arif's story: questioning the police logic of religious nationalism

First of all, I discuss two examples of IWC students trying to make sense of differences of religion and caste, particularly with reference to everyday life in the classroom. These examples are important not only because they offer insights into how students think about particular kinds of difference (caste or religion), but also because they foreground the intellectual capacity of IWC students; that is, more generally, in thinking through the lived realities of difference students are developing important analytical abilities without any systematic guidance. In view of teachers' view of IWC students' intellectual abilities (discussed in chapter 5) it is important to underscore this capacity. In a particularly long interview with Arif (Muslim, OBC), Dilip (SC), Mahesh (OBC), Rahul Subhash (SC), Dilshad (Muslim, OBC), I witnessed efforts by the students to engage with difference. This interview was heavily punctuated with horseplay which made the more serious discussions stand out because of the change in tone and level of engagement of individual boys. I had been feeling frustrated because of failed attempts to draw Arif or Dilshad out on the everyday harassment to which they were subjected: for example, Mayank's (UC) tendency to mark them as the other through references to their non-vegetarianism and their absolute refusal to engage in direct conflict with him. During this interview I realised that Arif was capable of developing another approach to unravelling and addressing religious and cultural difference and conflict. He kept interrupting my questions to ask his own (which were not necessarily linked with what we were discussing):

Arif: Like I am Muslim, someone is Hindu, someone Parsi, so when someone dies, why are those rituals different for everyone? For example in our case we bury, and in their community, they burn, and among Christians they lock in a box and bury in the ground.

Since I could not contribute any sensible answers to this one he asked me another one after narrating a recent incident around preference for vegetarian food at his uncle's wedding reception:

Arif: Teacher, there are these seashells *na*, found in the water in villages, *vo* people...Hindus also eat it...

(Since I had no idea what he was talking about he explained further.)

Arif: Seashells, right? Seashells – and inside it there is something else also, meat or something (he meant some creature), so don't Hindus eat that?

Reva: Some people eat it, not everyone.

Rahul Subhash: Some people do.

Arif: They do at our village [...] *ghengha*, it's called *ghengha*.

Rahul Subhash: *Ghengha*, and also *kenkda* (crab)

Arif: Yeah, people eat crabs too.

Reva: Some people do, others don't. Everyone has different rules.

Rahul Subhash: Brain becomes sharper if you eat crabs.

Reva: Oh that...different foods have different things (nutrients) like chicken... and if you eat fish, it's good for your eyes...

Arif: Yes.

Rahul Subhash: I don't eat [these things] at all.

Arif: I do.

Reva: Everything has some advantages and some disadvantages (I was clearly trying not to commit myself either way given the charged discourses around food, religion and marriages locally and nationally).

[...]

Arif: So what do eggs have?

Reva: [Eggs have] protein...

Arif: Makes your bones stronger... (He asked after a pause) How do we know it has protein?

Arif went on to ask me other questions that emerged in our speculative discussion about how scientists may have first thought about comparing and evaluation food items, how the nutrient content of food and medicines may be ascertained, and eventually the political economy of clinical trials. In other words, from anthropology we picked our way through chemistry, biology and economics and returned to sociology.

Arif's raising the question that Hindus could also be non-vegetarian was a refusal to be arbitrarily branded morally inferior on the basis of food habits. I also see Arif's ability to think and question as an example, in general, of IWC students' ability to reflect and critically engage. This discussion shows that students are capable of systematically thinking through cultural differences as well as questioning the conversion of differences into discrimination and conflict. Secondly, it also shows that students deserve opportunities and resources for reading, reflection and

discussion. They do not need to be taught how to ask questions or which questions to ask. The easy movement across disciplinary boundaries in the above conversation also shows that once a student's curiosity is aroused they will find their questions and given enough resources, ways of answering the questions as well.

Instead of asserting superiority or difference, or fighting for an essentialised category of "Muslim" he challenges dominant discourse and the idea of reified difference while also trying to understand the basis and meaning of difference. In the process, the rigidity of boundaries is questioned and to that extent his identity as a Muslim boy is also disrupted. In that moment of questioning a possible similarity that undoes boundaries and dominant discourse of religious difference he 'generates' a 'supplement' that 'cannot be included within any identity category' (Pelletier 2009: 4). Thus, his experiment in seeing another world within the world (Ranciere 1991) renders him a political subject (Simons and Masschelein 2010).

6.6.2 Renuka's story: a possible (emancipatory) 'politics of the other'?

Ranciere (1991) argues that an emancipatory 'politics of the other' becomes possible in the moment when we choose to step between identity boxes (Ranciere 1991: 63) in order to challenge discrimination. As the interview excerpted below shows, an instance of such politics could be observed in Renuka's (OBC) support for Rashmi (SC) who was, particularly, for Jyoti Gupta, a "bad" girl and a "bad student". The first part of this interview had taken place before I had understood the friendships and hostilities in the classroom. Thus I invited two groups of girls – Renuka, Rashmi (SC) and Chhaya (SC) on the one hand, and Dipali (SC) and Bindu (OBC) on the other – to join the conversation without realising that they did not get along with each other. Consequently, when I asked whether they would go to a private school if they could, Renuka (OBC), Chhaya (SC) and Rashmi (SC) were forced to lie to me and reply in the negative. Later that day, in a sequel to that conversation, Renuka sought me out to explain the situation and change their answer. In the process, she also explained the way information networks worked in the classroom and their fear of their replies and other tales being carried to Jyoti Gupta:

Renuka: Dipali and all are madam's pets, so 'by chance' if they told her... And all these things you have discussed in the interview, they will tell each other (that is, the missing members of Dipali's group) / So I thought what should I do? Then that's why I told you [the lie about choosing a government school]. Otherwise...I know Chhaya *didi* very well.

Reva: Chhaya is nice. I like Chhaya very much.

Renuka: Me too. I like Rashmi *didi* too, best of all. Whatever she is like, whatever everyone may say about her, but I like her very much.

As I shortly show, like Pramod Bhargav, Jyoti Gupta also policed Rashmi (SC) and Chhaya (SC) especially heavily because of the cousins' caste; and I suggest that Jyoti Gupta's disapproval of the two girls was the reason the English teacher also disapproved of Renuka's (OBC) support for Rashmi. The excerpt below shows that Renuka was aware of her teacher's disapproval of her, if not the reason behind it:

Renuka: English madam really doesn't like me at all.

Reva: Why?

Renuka: I don't know. That's why I don't talk to her much. I am very scared. 'By chance' if she explains (lessons) then I like it. Just now there was the oral test in English. I knew four [of the answers], I offered the four answers. [She] praised everyone, 'but why not me', that's what I thought. Then I said [to myself], 'let it go'...

Jyoti Gupta also used to make Renuka stay for the remedial classes despite the girl scoring well in all subjects. Renuka had noted and pointed out to me when Jyoti Gupta let others skip remedial classes but made Renuka go to the staffroom and apologise for leaving early one day. Since all the other teachers were happy with Renuka and during fieldwork I never found her to have broken any other rules, I argue that it was Renuka's friendship with Rashmi that caused her trouble with Jyoti Gupta. The girls' friendship subverted the "'good" student/"bad" student' binary fundamental to most classrooms. From her hairstyle and clothes to her comportment, speech and exam performance, Renuka modelled a good student to a 'T'. However, she was friends with Rashmi who broke many rules: she wore her hair stylishly, her clothes were a little tighter than Jyoti Gupta (and some of the girl students) liked, she talked back to teachers, befriended boys and did not perform well in examinations. Moreover, as discussed previously, moral codes around girls' appearance and actions are rooted in upper caste notions of chastity; and Rashmi showed few signs of accepting that code quietly. Thus, in befriending Rashmi Renuka

was not just wilfully ignoring good student/bad student distinction but also subverting the logic of Brahmanical patriarchy that was implicit in this distinction; in a way, Renuka was herself straddling the boundary between “good”/“bad”.

Thus Renuka stepped out of the box which could identify her unambiguously as a good student, in the process, enacting political subjectivation (Ranciere 1992; Simons and Masschelein 2010). Political subjectivation entails dissensus and a challenge to the existing order without reinforcing stereotypes though it may still be enmeshed with the police logic (Ranciere 2011). While Renuka refuses to fall in with her teacher’s judgment of fellow classmates, girls like Rani (ST), Bindu (OBC), Dipali (SC) and Roopa (OBC) appropriate disciplinary mechanisms of the classroom to strengthen their own positions vis. a vis. the rest of their classmates (both boys and girls). The following extract from an interview with Bindu and Dipali is an example of such governmental subjectivation:

(I had asked the girls if punishment given by teachers, particularly hitting students, had any effect. Though I had been thinking about boys because they were hit far more, and harder, Bindu and Dipali began to tell me what Jyoti Gupta had been saying about girls, especially Rashmi and Chhaya.)

Dipali: Yes...Madam, even now...madam still keeps an eye on Rashmi and Chhaya all the time.

Bindu: Just now, that day....on Children’s day...

Dipali: [Rashmi and Chhaya], you know, are so, like...and smell bad. Madam just tells them to their face, ‘you stand away from me’.

Bindu: And, weren’t they, on Children’s Day...

Dipali: And clothes too, like...

Bindu: ...Vikram and...asking them to take pictures here [...] You know what madam said, [Rashmi’s] sister had come to *iskool* just to show off her clothes... (Laughed)

[...]

Reva: So you think madam is right in saying these things?

Dipali: Yes. She is right. And they talk back too sometimes.

Thus, teachers also encouraged girls to police each other. Again, I suggest that the overall moral policing and the institutionalised genderclaste biases that underpinned the moral curriculum prevented some of the students from approaching teachers for academic or emotional support. For example, Ratna who was often rebuked by Prabha Shinde for being late or not paying attention would come to me during

revision classes in March to ask for help while Nilofar, the class topper and star, could approach Prabha Shinde even at times when the latter had explicitly instructed everyone not to disturb her in her administrative work. Nilofar's ways of being were closer to that of the normative child assumed in educational practice: she had little or no work responsibilities at home; she had family members (mother, uncle, sister) who had completed school education and could guide her through the cultural and educational demands at school; she did well on tests and during classroom teaching. Though Ratna made efforts to fulfil as much of the demands at school – punctuality, dressing the right way, preparing for tests – she did not have the cultural advantage that Nilofar had. For example, Ratna and a few other students, who were farther from this relatively protected and privileged ideal of childhood told me that they usually forgot the correct answers when they had to face Jyoti Gupta.

6.6.3 Pawan and Mayank's story: questioning teachers' moral authority

If some students appropriated the mechanisms and practices of moral evaluation others questioned these. In a conversation that was surprisingly sombre and serious at times, Mayank (UC) and Pawan (UC) criticised a prominent aspect of their classroom experience: that teachers made it sound like they were doing students a personal favour by disbursing welfare benefits or investing in the school. Teachers seem to have seamlessly identified themselves with the administration and the state vis. a vis. students and their families. As discussed in a previous section beneficiaries of welfare schemes were seen as being lesser citizens; as if being a beneficiary were a moral flaw.

This part of our interview constituted a rare occasion where Mayank (UC) did not lapse into songs, ham dialogues from movies or use advertisement jingles from the television in his replies. Both boys were deeply disapproving of some of their teachers' behaviour. Mayank was far more articulate than Pawan (UC), and perhaps, far more upset than Pawan as well; so, his answers came in faster every time I asked a question. During a discussion of which teachers they liked best, the boys told me that they resented the way Jyoti Gupta and Manish Tiwari made everything they did

sound like a favour for the students; and that the two teachers tried to shame students by reminding them that every time a student misbehaved their parents had to come to school. As individuals, Mayank and Pawan had felt frustrated at being singled out as the culprits even when they had not committed any mischief; as part of the community of poor (IWC) students in the classroom they had resented teachers' expectation of gratitude when the latter were not spending any resources out of their own pockets.

Mayank: And if anything's to be done, [Manish Tiwari will say], 'I invested five hundred rupees, invested for you, is this something...keep telling us [they've] done us a favour...

Pawan: [We] can spend five hundred in a day, in two or three days...

Mayank: It's not about spending. They shouldn't make us feel like they're doing us a favour. Now...everyone is from a poor family. They make us feel like they are doing us a favour, spending two thousand, 'daily, daily'... there are other schools...this isn't the only school you know!

Pawan: Anyway, own LED from home...[the one] that was at his home... one bought for school, that he's kept (Mayank began laughing a little), and that one from home, he's put up here...

In this conversation the boys were accusing Manish Tiwari of having defrauded the school by appropriating the computer that was meant for the Smart Class. It is easy enough to expect the worst from public functionaries in India but these children's statements are not important in terms of establishing the "truth" of teachers' actions. (Instead, some of the older boys who disliked Manish Tiwari for being unkind to them actually pointed out that the two other men teachers resented him precisely because he was extremely honest which effectively prevented everyone else from embezzling school funds as well.) Rather, I see this as the boys' attempt to morally judge teachers and undermine teachers' authority as sole arbiters of im/morality in a context in which the former have limited control over the classroom discourse.

Thus Mayank (UC) and Pawan (UC) appropriated the moral discourse of the classroom and turned it against the Head-Master. In thus positioning themselves in opposition to teachers they 'reitera[e] and confir[m] those conditions that make' this discourse of morality possible (Davies 2006: 426) and enact a governmental subjectivity (Simons and Masschelein 2010). In class, both the boys were often disruptive, particularly, Mayank for whom the stakes were higher because his father

had a reputation for being an alcoholic and being in and out of prison. Students like Mahesh (OBC) needled him about it frequently. “Disruptive”, “rude”, “irresponsible” and “incapable” Mayank was the quintessential “bad” student. Thus, both Mayank and his father were regularly evaluated to be morally lacking and irresponsible. These dynamics need to be seen in the context of the classroom discourse which constructs IWC students as ‘labour class’ and ‘*jaanwars*’. Again, while individual caste locations do not explain all instances of contestation, subversion and negotiation in the classroom, the historical caste-based division and hierarchy of labour is always entangled with the class difference between students and teachers in state schools, in general.

6.6.4 The intertwined stories of Arif, Bushra and Mayank: power and contestation

The only positive recognition Mayank received in the classroom was being addressed as ‘*pandit*’ by two of his teachers, Pramod Bhargav and Manish Tiwari. This recognition was a consequence of his caste and religious location; I suggest that it afforded him the opportunity to explicitly judge someone who has painstakingly been constructed within some of the dominant discourses in and beyond the classroom as the “other” of the Indian/Hindu man/boy: the Muslim boy/man. In the classroom, Arif (Muslim, OBC) often became the target of Mayank’s right-wing, anti-Muslim rhetoric. It is important to remember that Mayank reported having attended camps organised by the RSS and his regularly taunting Arif and Dilshad¹⁰⁰) was another reflection of the strong anti-minority narrative in Indore.

Dominant images of masculinity do not leave much space for boys to seek, or be offered, the protection that girls might be offered in schools. The short, unassuming Arif was at the receiving end of much bullying, ridicule (by both girls and boys) and

¹⁰⁰ Mayank never targeted the Muslim girls in the classroom; part of the reason for this could be that teachers always took girls’ complaints against boys very seriously. Teachers also seemed a little biased against boys and some of the girls told me how they used this bias against boys to ensure that the latter ‘stayed in their place’.

outright verbal and, at times, physical aggression because of his height and non-vegetarianism. At the same time, at home, Arif was expected to be the “good” and “responsible” son and brother who kept his sister and the daughter of the house, Bushra, under surveillance. Bushra was not the only girl in such a predicament. In chapter four I have shown that since daughters/sisters are seen as representing the ‘honour’ of a family (Amin 1995) parents and siblings often seek to keep girls under surveillance. Girls from a range of caste and religious backgrounds reported stories of having their movements monitored by brothers, men cousins and in some cases, even brothers’ (men) friends. Following are excerpts from a conversation with Arif about such monitoring:

Reva: And you keep an eye on her? I’ve heard that brothers keep an eye on sisters...what she does, where she goes, who she talks to...

Arif: Yes.

Reva: Why? You are younger so why are *you* keeping an eye on *her*? (Because usually older siblings are supposed to take care of and keep an eye on younger siblings)

Arif: *Arey* so that’s only because mothers ask us to! That’s why we’ve been put in the same school...

Reva: So you’ll know.... So what will happen if you don’t keep an eye on her? What will go wrong?

Arif: Nothing.... Like, they talk to boys...that’s all...

For her part, Arif’s sister, Bushra, wished to do well at school and was supported by her family in doing so as well. She was not sure till what level she will be educated but she was deeply invested in doing well and was held up by teachers as an exemplary student: she assisted teachers in carrying out their duties, minded the class when required, scored very well, went for tuitions and also led the assembly alongside Dilip (SC), Dilshad (Muslim, OBC) and Nilofar (Muslim, OBC).

Thus all three students were constantly negotiating various discourses of the “good student”, “good girl/boy” and “Hindu/Muslim”. In the process, they had become embroiled in particular kinds of supporting or confrontational and antagonistic relationships with each other, with each individual trying to negotiate the best deal for themselves in terms of certain degrees of both freedom and status. However, long histories of socially unjust and unequal relations mean that a Mayank (UC) cannot control discourses around the “good” or “bad” student as much as a teacher

could. An Arif (Muslim, OBC) is not likely to have as much control over discourses of religious nationalism and a Bushra (Muslim, OBC) cannot control discourses around girls' honour and women's role and status in the family and community. These limitations notwithstanding, they are constantly negotiating. Arif and Bushra had earned a high status in the classroom as a result of their educational success and the appropriation of the "good student" ideal for themselves (in the process further marginalising Mayank as a "bad student"). While Mayank, through his participation in the right wing discourses in and beyond the classroom may find a somewhat stable anchor in his identity as a caste Hindu man (and in the process manage to further marginalise the siblings as citizens).

To some extent, these are ongoing and open-ended negotiations, but at different times, different discourses may be harder to challenge. For example, no matter their success in education Muslim kids are going to find it harder in the current climate to convert their educational success into opportunities for upward mobility in India. Similarly, women – Hindu or Muslim – in a very anti-poor, anti-welfare climate will find it harder to assert and access their rights and challenge patriarchal family structures. Since access to higher education and health care is increasingly difficult, they may have to remain dependent on the family structure for certain kinds of material support and protection. That is, material conditions and historical power relations place certain limits on the extent to which an individual may be able to challenge and negotiate dominant discourses.

6.6.5 Dilip's story: challenging Brahmanical patriarchy

Dilip's views on girls' rights are a crucial part of the stories of resistance in this classroom. Dilip's family background has been discussed in previous chapters; he was a Dalit student whose parents had come from their native village in Madhya Pradesh to Indore after Dilip had begun school. His father and grandfather had suffered considerable caste-based socioeconomic oppression in the village. Dilip had three siblings and his father worked as a construction worker. Though he was considered a good student by his teachers he had also been struggling with conceptual issues. He could not afford private tuitions and worked in a garment manufacturing unit

after school to supplement the family's income. The most remarkable thing about Dilip was his consistent articulation of a gender-just worldview, especially with regards to girls' education, marriage and movement.

As I have shown the dominant narrative around gender relations is that of distance and division between boys and girls at both, school and home. In such a context, students who are willing to challenge a fundamental aspect of the logic of Brahmanical patriarchy – the control over girls' sexuality – are crucial to the project of reimagining social relations in and through education. As such, Dilip was a rarity among boys. During an interview with Mayank (UC), Dilshad (OBC), Rahul Subhash (SC), Mahesh (OBC) and Dilip (SC), I asked the boys for their views on love marriages. Rahul Subhash and Dilip enthusiastically claimed that they will marry the girl they liked while Mayank said he was not interested in marriage and Dilshad sounded unsure of how successful his attempt to get his parents to come around to a love marriage may be. However, responses to my next question reveal the gendered nature and limits of this enthusiasm:

Reva: So you can marry a girl of your choice. Can your sisters marry someone of their choice?

Rahul Subhash: No. | Dilshad: Sisters won't...No. | Mayank: I will kill her.
| Dilip: Why not? | Mahesh: I don't have any sisters.

Mayank: Madam, our future is in our hands!

Reva: So isn't hers, in her hands?

Mayank: No, why on earth? (Very vehemently)! [I will] kill her!

Dilip: A girl can, too. The guy's family members should be nice...

Rahul Subhash (now agreeing with Dilip): ... Guy's family members should be nice.

[...]

Dilip: One, the people in his family should be nice and the guy, who she chooses, he should have some work. [...] The boy should also be good so that [the girl's] family thinks... Then maybe they will agree.

In another group interview Dilip had also suggested that if a girl tells her parents to meet the boy of her choice and his family then it will not lead to loss of status for the girl's family in society. Dilip was basically suggesting that love marriages be "arranged" by families (*thu-thu bi ni hogi aur rishta bhi ho jayega*). He was aware of

the restrictive logic of endogamy and demonstrated the ability to realistically think of ways to make it happen.

Moreover, in contrast to the state and teachers (for example, Usha Pandey's speech on Children's Day) he also spoke of girls' right to education and work in terms of their desires rather than the instrumentality of women's work and education to family or nation (NCERT 2006, Pappu 2002) in a rare interview when I could speak to him alone at school. I had asked him about girls' right to access education and jobs and to go out (fieldnotes taken during our conversation):

'They should get equal rights. / [Girls] should not be made to stay at home. [Boys] don't harass so much that ...they also wish to go out. / They should stay away from the bad ones. Should report at home if someone bothers them so that a worse incident doesn't happen.' His own sister is eleven and he says that to solve girls' problems families should: 'spend money, escort them [to places if it's not safe], talk to the guy harassing her, threaten if he doesn't understand.' / He believed in girls' rights because: 'Girls are doing well – government is also giving much support, boys aren't doing well. So we should support girls.' Will the police help? He thought they were useless. Won't help/protect girls. Demand protection in Indore too.

Thus despite the everyday problems around girls' freedom to move as they please, he believed that families should go to as much trouble as possible to ensure girls' rights to go out, work, get education and marry a man of their choice. Usually his friends demonstrated patriarchal leanings and that did not faze him. Throughout my fieldwork he consistently expressed the same views. This, I argue, is another instance of political subjectivation as Dilip refused to subscribe to dominant views around gender roles and relations and girls' status in family and society. He refuses to act as the young man who must police girls and participate in the regulation of gender in ways acceptable to wider society. He enacts the possibility of being a different kind of "man", one who refuses the binary opposition and hierarchy that organizes social relations within the police logic (Ranciere 2013, Bingham and Biesta 2010) of Brahmanical patriarchy.

6.6.6 Rashmi and Chhaya's story: (not) being the "good" schoolgirl

Rashmi and Chhaya were cousins I have mentioned several times previously; they were from the Dalit community and because of their friendships with boys in the

classroom, they often incurred the displeasure of two of their teachers, Pramod Bhargav and Jyoti Gupta. The girls were interested in continuing and completing school education, though Chhaya did better than Rashmi at school while the latter struggled with many subjects. Rashmi was also the more nervous student in terms of her ability to read out aloud or answer questions asked during classroom teaching. The two girls negotiated their casted and gendered studenthood in different ways in the classroom. Rashmi came across as a “bad school girl” who insisted on accessorising in contradiction to explicit orders from teachers; she was also too nervous to read out aloud or answer in class (though she sometimes knew the correct answers and she certainly could read Hindi well). She brazened it out in moments of nervousness by smiling, laughing and making jokes. However, as the following excerpt suggests, at home, Rashmi tries to engage in dissensus. This is part of a conversation where the two girls were telling me about Chhaya’s older brother’s wife, Pratima *bhabhi*, who had left home after an injury had rendered her husband mentally unstable. Pratima had left her two daughters at her in-laws’ and gone to her parents to complete her Nursing programme so she could support her husband and daughters. We had been discussing how the in-laws saw the situation:

Reva: So it’s not like they show in movies that no one takes the daughter in law’s side..?

Chhaya: Earlier no one used to take her side, but, poor thing, what was she supposed to do?

Reva: So did you never take her side?

Chhaya: Yes...

Rashmi: *I* (emphasis hers) always do. I also talk to her on the phone. She had given me a phone number before leaving...

Chhaya: No, she is very nice. Bhabhi is ‘friendly’. Whenever she comes, is with us only...

Rashmi: With younger people, doesn’t sit much with the oldies...

Chhaya: [She] shares a lot...doesn’t yell at anyone, solves everything too... [She] is very nice. Not like...like if there’s a programme or something at home...

Rashmi: ...[She] takes leave and comes.

Chhaya: ...just that...

Reva: So she has maintained some relationship with the household, not like she’s completely broken away

Rashmi (slowly and thoughtfully): She does have some anger [toward the family].

Within the dominant patriarchal logic it is an important part of being a “good” girl/woman to monitor and regulate other women/girls. As a sister-in-law Rashmi will be expected to support her own family rather than her sister-in-law’s rights to complete her education and find work. Thus, in supporting her sister-in-law, Rashmi refuses the police logic of Bramanical patriarchy and questions the existing gendered distribution of roles and places. As her conversation revealed, Rashmi’s expectation and/or belief that Pratima planned to come back after completing her degree programme to live with the marital family, may be playing a role in the former’s support for her sister-in-law; in that sense, perhaps, Rashmi’s act of political subjectivation, remains ‘confused’ somewhat with the police logic (Ranciere 2011) of patriarchy.

On the other hand, Chhaya, often as nervous as Rashmi in the classroom, made efforts to play the role of the “good school girl” and refused to let teachers’ policing and shaming discourage her from challenging efforts to essentialise the “good student” as a caste Hindu one. I had been asking both girls why they were so nervous in the classroom and got the following response:

Rashmi: I don’t like reading in the class...I feel shy.

[...]

Chhaya: Not shy, nervous, I especially feel... like they ask us anything at all, any madam asks me to get up *na*, for even a minute, I, feel nervous, strangely [nervous].

Reva: But you people can read well!

Chhaya: [I] get nervous, then afterwards I make myself ‘feel’ (her word) that I am standing in front of so many people...then only I answer correctly.

Chhaya saw Usha Pandey as her role model. She also played by the book in terms of dress and hair at school:

Chhaya: Bhargav sir and Jyoti teacher doubt us so much, really a lot. (She was referring to their monitoring Rashmi and Chhaya’s interaction with boys)

Vaishali (who was friends with the girls): If Rashmi even styles her hair the least bit [they will go after her]...

Chhaya: I get super scared... that’s why I rarely do anything [against the rules regarding dress]

Thus Chhaya simultaneously enacts both governmental and political subjectivation in negotiating her place and status as a particular kind of school girl. Structures of caste and gender are deeply intertwined and I suggest that she tackles them simultaneously in two different ways: on the one hand, in finding the courage to offer the right answer to teacher's question she acts 'as if' (Bingham and Biesta 2010, Ranciere 2010) she is the same as any other (non-Dalit) student; she sees herself as a peer and refuses to lose her nerve in front of everyone despite the 'strange nervousness' that she experiences. In standing up with dignity and courage she refuses to be tied to her identity as a Dalit girl (in teachers' view). However, in simultaneously accepting teachers' injunctions to dress in "appropriate" ways (particularly her hair) Chhaya also enacted the "good school girl", a governmental subject.

6.7 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a discussion of how students from IWC communities and/or non-dominant castes are constructed as "*jaanwar*" and "labour class" within the classroom discourse. These labels and other practices of moral policing entail teachers' construction of students as less moral, less capable and less deserving of respect and dignity thus reinforcing genderclaste relations in complex ways. The mundane process of submission of documents and maintenance of records becomes the site of reproduction of teachers' institutional and social status.

It is important to note that the critique of pedagogic practices or social relations this thesis offers is not a criticism of individual teachers; it is only meant to provide a perspective on students' experiences in contemporary classrooms. A discussion of teachers' genderclasted experiences at home and school is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to note that teachers' work is also shaped by personal and institutional circumstances which must also be systematically interrogated. Secondly, teachers' views and practices are also shaped by the same dominant discourses in which the rest of the society participates. As I mentioned in chapter five, there is nothing in teachers' own educational and professional experience to

support a critical engagement with larger social relations/wider discourses on their part (Batra 2006). Therefore, any efforts to change what happens in classrooms must also engage with realities of teacher education programmes in India and teachers' experiences as genderclasted subjects in institutional and social contexts.

This chapter also shows that classroom processes must be situated in the larger context of patriarchal families and communities, systematic disenfranchisement of impoverished and "lower" caste communities and inadequate infrastructure (housing, sanitation or other facilities). For example, construction of families belonging to impoverished and non-dominant caste groups as "unclean" has to be seen in the context of the caste-system and imperatives of its reproduction. Similarly, the policing of gender roles, images and relationships is linked to the reproduction of entire complex of genderclaste relations; it is another discourse that extends from the home all the way into the classroom despite the efforts and intention of teachers like Usha Pandey who are far kinder to girls and more tolerant of romantic attractions and attachments.

As evident in discussions of governmental subjectivity some students appropriate the police logic of moral evaluation by teachers in order to create opportunities to be seen as "good" students and to manipulate their relationship with, and their (genderclaste) status vis. a vis., peers. While such strategies allow these students to achieve a status they might not have in wider society but they also fail to take on the oppressive constructions of particular social groups. Strategies like those of Mayank's may also achieve the opposite resulting in academic failure and perhaps closing off possibilities for upward mobility for him.

However, there are also moments and acts of political subjectivation which offer some hope and concrete possibilities for disruption existing social logics. In the acts of Chhaya, Dilip or Rashmi, one finds students experimenting with being a different self, and with seeing the world differently too, 'as if' they were the same as other speaking beings (Bingham and Biesta 2010, Ranciere 1991). Such 'political' practice is important at one level for the individual to develop a capacity and willingness for resistance; at another level, it is also a coping and survival strategy which may help her succeed at school. Instead of accepting the teacher's evaluation of her by virtue

of her caste/gender locations she is challenging that evaluation but in a way that does not spoil her chances of learning in the classroom. Lastly, these students' political subjectivation may have implications for others that no ethnography may be able to capture. Other pupils may observe, reflect upon, and learn from, them. In that sense such instances of political subjectivation can be seen as a student *modelling resistance* for herself as well as others.

Chapter 7

Curricular content, form and “quality”: a sociology of unequal education

In the previous chapter I looked at the way certain kinds of moral agendas are sought to be legitimated and pursued in classrooms and the way these moral agendas are linked with genderclaste-based domination. In this chapter I use the same genderclaste lens to scrutinise curricular aspects of classroom discourse, that is, what Apple (2014) terms ‘official knowledge’. I showed in chapter two that curriculum analysis is a well-developed field in India and there are several possible approaches to it. However, in this thesis, in terms of textbook content analysis I only take up ‘representativeness’ (ibid) and the relationship of school knowledge with ‘out of school’ or ‘everyday’ knowledge. These aspects of curricular texts help me analyse the way particular communities are represented in textbooks and the extent to which their life worlds and worldviews drive textbook narratives. As mentioned in chapter two, my analysis of textbook content draws upon existing literature in India (Advani 1996; Bhog 2002; Kumar 1989; Manjrekar 2007, 2011; Scrase 1993 and Talib 2003) as well as Young’s (1971) ‘sociology of knowledge’.

I focus only on the Hindi and English language textbooks. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, of the five teachers¹⁰¹ whose classes I was able to observe regularly throughout fieldwork, Jyoti Gupta and Pramod Bhargav were the only ones who made references to the everyday aspects of life (even if these references were coloured by their own experiences). Secondly, since I also wished to capture, after Manjrekar 2007 and Kumar 1989, the transaction of particular lessons, Sanskrit and Social Science were not suitable; Prabha Shinde often spent class time finishing administrative work, and M L Vishwakarma rarely taught. Thirdly, as a result of neoliberal discourses of “quality” and its measurability, nationally and

¹⁰¹ As mentioned in chapter 5, M L Vishwakarma rarely entered the classroom. The first Guest Teacher, Preeti Mali, was often replaced by Manish Tiwari in the Mathematics class; four months into the fieldwork she quit her job and was replaced by Geeta Sisodiya who was unable to conduct classes regularly in the remaining three months of the academic year due to disruptions to the school routine.

internationally, the focus has been on Mathematics and languages (Soudien et al. 2012) which was also reflected in government orders received at the school during fieldwork. However, while Mathematics (alongside Science) curriculum and classroom discourses demand a specific genderclasted way of being, talking and thinking (Rampal 1992, 2015) I could not focus on it because of constraints of space and theoretical framework. Thus I chose to focus primarily on Hindi and English language teaching and textbooks for the purposes of the first section of this chapter. For the rest of the chapter I analyse 'curricular form' and the way it 'controls' and regulates access to knowledge along lines of class difference and hierarchy (Apple 2013, 2014). I deploy an analytical framework that combines Apple's work with Sarangapani's analysis of the neoliberal discourse of quality and its implications for the government school system in India and the impoverished children who rely on this system (Sarangapani 2010, Kumar and Sarangapani 2006). This framework allows me to add a dimension to the existing curriculum debate in India by specifically theorising aspects of 'form' including textbooks exercises and assessment policy and practices that, working in tandem with pedagogic principles and curricular texts, put IWC students in government schools at a distinct disadvantage vis. a vis. students in (most) other categories of schools. Thus, in this chapter, 'class' is the primary analytical category; though the educational discrimination that IWC students face due to lower curricular and assessment standards in this category of schools has greater implications for girl students and students from non-dominant castes because they also often have to struggle against various forms of gender and caste-based discrimination.

While curriculum reform has rightly been viewed in the Indian context as a fundamental problem for students across different kinds of schools in the country (Gol 1993; Kumar 1989, 2004; Sarangapani 2010) it is also important to interrogate curricular form specifically in terms of its role in reproducing caste-based educational disadvantage. This disadvantage has mostly been problematized from the point of view of representation and even within this approach feminist analyses of gender biases are more common than similar analyses of caste and class. In the case of 'social class', again, the analysis has been limited to biases in representation. There has not been a systematic engagement of the form of curriculum, particularly

in the context of neoliberal reforms in education that, in the name of “quality”, have tended to take a minimalist approach to curriculum and assessment in state government schools in India (Sarangapani 2010). These are some of the gaps I begin to address in this chapter. In addition to biased representations I look at textbook exercises and test questions in order to unpack the kind of skills and knowledges these require. Further, I interrogate assessment and test preparation practices in the classroom with reference to some important policy changes that have taken place recently; these changes include, significantly, a state-wide standardised test introduced in 2011 in Madhya Pradesh and is part of the disturbing discourse of “quality” in the country.

Between December 2014 and March 2015 the school routine was severely disrupted for a number of reasons (as explained in chapter 3). Thus, an important aspect of my work also suffered: I was unable to systematically discuss either lesson content with students, or their experience of preparing for various tests (or, their disinclination to do so). However, given the inadequate discussion of curricular form in the existing Indian literature Curriculum Studies, I have chosen to document and theorise problematic aspects of curricula form and assessment policy and practice. This chapter is different from the previous three data chapters in that its focus is limited to aspects of reproduction in/through education. I have, instead, focused on the way curriculum and assessment limited the opportunities available to IWC students to develop skills and abilities needed for successfully completing school and/or higher education.

7.1 ‘Whose knowledge is this?’: social relations, the everyday and the sociology of knowledge

In this section I take a look at representations of genderclaste images and relations in the Hindi and English language textbooks following the second of the three approaches Nawani (2013) identifies in her review of existing critiques of Indian textbooks; that is, attend to the text and the ‘socio-psychological world of the reader’ (ibid: 167) as well as aspects of the ‘learning context’ (ibid: 178). Both

approaches entail a number of components that may be engaged and I focus on the specific aspects of students' lives I have examined so far in this thesis: their lives at home and work, and their social and pedagogic relations at school. In order to review the representativeness aspect I use Sleeter and Grant's (1991) instrument and look at the number of characters from different class-caste groups, by gender and what roles various characters play in the story in order to understand what power relations have been emphasised in the text. I analysed images, story lines and number and role of characters in the two textbooks.

Following is a table listing all the subjects, textbooks and languages used in the textbooks prescribed for each subject.

Table 7.1 List of subjects, textbooks and language of textbooks.

Subject	Prescribed textbooks (Only the three language textbooks had specific names)	Textbook language*
Hindi	Bhasha Bharati Class VIII	Hindi
English	English Reader (General Series) Class VIII	English**
Mathematics	Ganit Class VIII	Hindi
Sanskrit	Surabhi Class VIII	Sanskrit
Science	Vigyan Class VIII	Hindi
Social Science	Samajik Vigyan Class VIII	Hindi

* The Hindi used in all textbooks was formal, Sanskritised Hindi; the Hindi of Science, Mathematics and Social Science textbooks was especially difficult and literary Hindi.

** While Hindi was the medium of education, this cohort had learnt English as the second language from Class I.

7.1.1 Learning...gender, class and caste

In the Hindi textbook only eight out of the twenty-five lessons had any references to a woman/girl character. These were mostly the more “innocent” characters of mothers, daughters and sisters; the one wife character was shown to be selfish, foolish and in need of a lesson in generosity from her husband. Bhog (2002) has shown that textbooks tend to reify certain characteristics as “masculine” and others as “feminine” as well as reinforcing the binary opposition between the two. Within the largely upper caste, middle class worlds represented in the textbook, the women were presented as passive individuals who were married off according to men’s wishes, stayed at home and took care of the family (cooking, decorating the house, taking care of children), or were selfish and foolish. Most of the women were also shown as being uninformed and in the narrative will be ‘enlightened’ by a male relative or acquaintance – cousin, friend, husband, son or teacher.

There were two stories of “heroic” women but their heroism was not based on a challenge to patriarchal definitions of gender roles and positions, rather, on the reinforcement of the dominant “masculine” and “feminine”. One was the story of an old beggar woman whose “motherly” care and sacrifice for a child she brings up as her own makes her the bigger-hearted person in the story. The other was the story of a woman who mobilises villagers and sacrifices her life to save the forest around her village. Although in both the stories the women are shown to have valuable characteristics they also lose out in material ways – life savings and proximity with the child in the former and life in the latter. There was only one story where women were shown to be both spiritually and materially more victorious but there were no men/boys in that story so the relational aspect was rendered invisible literally by keeping men out of the three images in the lesson. Thus the women were good, even great, but *not visibly greater than men*. This was the story of a paraplegic student whose hard work and determination alongside her mother’s support for her helps her obtain a doctorate in a system that is largely incapable of supporting individuals with any kind of disability.

Just like teacher talk, lesson content also tended to name class-difference readily while eliding caste identities, difference and conflict. Here it must be noted that

narratives of poverty tended to glorify the poor (Advani 1996) rather than be invoked in order to question existing social or economic systems. A majority of the protagonists in both textbooks were kings, priests, landowners and middle class professionals; their worldviews and terms of engagement with the world underpinned most narratives in the two textbooks. Secondly, like Advani (ibid: 2081), I also found stories and proverbs to be systematically 'devaluing the very desire to acquire wealth. Drawing on Gandhian asceticism, the other-worldly tenets of brahmanical Hindu scriptures [...], this discourse seeks to abjure the pursuit of mone[y]' and constantly suggest that it is synonymous with greed.' For example, there were stories of (1) a greedy brother willing to kill his other 3 brothers in order to obtain all his father's wealth (Hindi textbook), (2) a miser who is caricatured (English textbook), and (3) more than one proverb discussing the virtue of wanting little, or the pitfalls of being greedy. Similarly, '[t]here is here a curiously conflictual attitude to the questions of labour and profit. On the one hand, there is an exhortation towards hard work but on the other, approval for the fruits of labour is absent.' Or, the way the 'fruits of (their) labour' are denied to most of the workers, particularly, children and women, in the informal sector (ibid: 2081). The seriousness of this absence can perhaps be understood if we attend to the fact that Madhya Pradesh is also the state that has consistently paid the lowest minimum wages in the country. Kumar (1989) also highlights the feudal past and present of the state and its glaring social inequalities within which lesson content must be evaluated.

To some extent, occupations and patterns of language can be used to infer caste. Similarly, class when not named could be inferred from the households and life-worlds depicted: for example, educated adults, letter writing among family members, availability of newspapers, health-care choices, or, travel for tourism purposes. Of twenty-five there were only three stories where some of the characters could possibly have been Dalit. In all the others, either through language used by characters, occupations (for example, king, priest, or jeweller) or ownership of property it could be inferred that the characters were upper-caste. If Dalit, these

characters – for example, boys in school uniforms with ties and belts¹⁰² – were middle class. As discussed in chapter five, I have used language as an indicator of class and caste because fieldwork showed that there were distinct differences between the Hindi spoken by upper caste and other students. The former spoke the more formal, Sanskritised Hindi used in the school textbooks more comfortably.

Further, as Advani (1996) argues, social or economic systems are never questioned in textbooks; instead the onus to succeed or survive is squarely on the individual. This is one of the most insidious themes running through the majority of stories in both textbooks and is facilitated by a near-complete absence of contemporary contexts (Scrase 1993) and a suggestion of ‘timelessness’ (ibid) about the stories. There were only five stories that could possibly have been contemporary; however, even this could only be inferred from the mention of newspapers, air travel and other very general characteristics which placed the stories no more specifically than somewhere in post-independence India.

7.1.2 Teachers and texts: teaching lessons in gender and class

How teachers interpret and use texts in the classroom (Nawani 2013, Kumar 1989) is an important aspect of curricular transaction. Following Manjrekar (2007) and Kumar (1989) I now unpack two instances, one each from Hindi and English classrooms, to show how teachers’ worldviews can mediate curricular representations and distortions of gender, caste and class images and relations as well as silences around these. The first one is an incident from Jyoti Gupta’s classroom when she was teaching the lesson on Indian origin astronaut Kalpana Chawla. This was a rare narrative about a woman role model who was presented as such. To that extent, it was a commendable exercise in inspiring girls and perhaps creating space for all students to imagine and accept women as role models in the public sphere. But that is where the list of positives ends. The lesson only offers information about Kalpana Chawla – when and where she was born, what schools

¹⁰² Ties and belts generally represent various categories of private schools or the Kendriya Vidyalayas (central government schools).

and universities she attended and the names and dates of her important flights into space, etc. There is no information on the authors of the lesson, and what original texts were used as resources for the lesson. Like most other lessons in the English textbook, there is no rich description or analysis of contexts, situations or emotional responses. There is only a litany of facts as evident in the following excerpt from the textbook where Kalpana Chawla is visiting an imaginary school and school-children are asking her questions:

Rohan: Please tell us about your childhood.

Kalpana: Well, I was born on 1 July 1961 in Karnal, Haryana. I had always dreamt about flying when I was a child. In fact, I thought of going farther than the pilots and wanted to become an astronaut at the age of thirteen.

Kavita: Do tell us more about yourself.

Kalpana: (Laughing) Well, I am a strict vegetarian. I respect my teachers. I like reading, flying, hiking and bird-watching.

Aslam: What courses did you have to go through to become an astronaut?

Kalpana: After passing higher secondary examination from Tagore school, Karnal in 1976 I joined Punjab engineering college, Chandigarh for my Bachelor's degree in Aeronautical Engineering in 1982. I then moved on to the University of Texas, USA for my Master's Degree in Aerospace Engineering in 1984. I earned my Ph. D. in the same subject from the University of Colorado, USA in 1988. (Class VIII English textbook, p. 73)

When she first did this lesson in the classroom Jyoti Gupta rebuked the girls for not having the kind of courage that Chawla had displayed:

A woman who went into space! [...] you are afraid to even leave your house!
(01/10/2014)

This was problematic because, as mentioned above, narratives in the textbook invariably constructed "success" as a direct and unquestioned result of *individual* hard work irrespective of an individual's gender, caste, locations or access to necessary infrastructure and decision-making mechanisms. This insistence not only on the individuating nature of values such as "courage", "hard work" or "fear" but also on the *universality* of these values became untenable in a classroom full of IWC students, especially girls like Sunita, who braved street harassment without any support just in order to come to school (discussed in chapter four). The specific meaning of ideas of "fear" and "courage" that inscribed Sunita's everyday life were invisible – or worthless – to the teacher. Such universalisation of meanings and

contexts allowed teachers to refuse to acknowledge and appreciate the socioeconomic inequalities and associated constraints in terms of money, food, healthcare, safe spaces and protection from harassment and violence that crucially shaped children's scholastic ambition and effort. Such a refusal then makes it more convenient for upper-caste, middleclass teachers to associate a *cultural* lack of ambition and grit on the part of IWC students. Such assumptions were underscored in Jyoti Gupta's comments on this story during revision a month later (field notes):

'You read the lesson, especially girls, did you feel anything? How did she become [an astronaut]? By studying. And then she had dreams as well? We also dream... what have you dreamt of? I ask every year, don't I? [Your dreams are] just that you should get married, [have] children and all that...?' Some girls shook their heads. (01/05/2014)

Failing to see this shaking of heads, Jyoti Gupta added (field notes):

'Only if we have dreams, that these will come true. [...] start making efforts now, start memorizing, all problems will get solved....God will also help you.' (05/11/2014)

Such remarks denoted structural inequality and historical gendercaste relations on access to, and success in, school education. This denial is a consequence of caste biases in texts as well as in teachers' speech even if it does not (necessarily) shape students' understanding of their status, position or opportunities in and beyond the classroom.

7.1.3 Teachers and texts: teaching lessons in caste

The instance I now analyse from Pramod Bhargav's classroom highlights the problems with silencing and eliding caste in textbook narratives. I found that amid an absolute refusal in lesson to name even the notion of caste, let alone, to explicitly identify individual character's castes and caste conflict between characters an implicit mention of lower caste personalities in textbooks could conveniently be ignored by upper caste teachers. Secondly, since students are not allowed to speak when teachers "teach", except to clarify doubts teachers can use their authority to express their views without having to engage in a discussion, or, to substantiate these views. Sarangapani (2003) also found that only teachers had the authority to bring outside knowledge into classroom discussions. Pramod Bhargav particularly

chose two of the lessons in the Hindi textbook to talk about caste and systematically misrepresented the brutality, specificities and rigidity of caste-systems in the country. Since he never specified the locale or time he was referring to, like narratives in the textbooks, he also conveyed a sense of universality and the ahistorical nature of social systems under discussion (field notes):

Pramod Bhargav was teaching, 'Poems of devotion' (*Bhakti ke pad*): Makes it sound like caste was always based on work when it has actually been [based on] birth [for past few centuries]. / *Bhagvad Geeta*¹⁰³ is seamlessly connected to "our nation". / He speaks as if Kshatriya castes (warrior castes in the north) were saving weak or poor people. / He glosses over everything in one statement: bad practices had entered our society. Vivekananda and other great men eliminated these. (22/09/2014)

a) During lesson, 'Maheshwar': 'Before the English we were enslaved by the Mughals!' (03/12/2014)

b) Democracy – is a system where the power is in the hands of the people. Now who has made Narendra Modi the Prime Minister? Students responded in a chorus: 'the people!' to protect the people, the country, there used to be – the king, the monarchy. (03/12/2014)

c) 'Our, our society – was divided in four classes, religions... All this Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian – didn't use to work. Since the world came into existence, there were four classes – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.' (03/12/2014)

While the first extract is problematic because of his distorted view of caste, the second combines (mis)representations of caste and religion in complex ways of a piece with 'the Hindutva view of history' (Visweswaran et al. 2009). I break the latter extract down into 3 parts to explain this complexity. This extract deals with Pramod Bhargav's transaction of the lesson, 'Maheshwar'. Maheshwar is a town in Madhya Pradesh which has historical and religious significance. In part a) he simultaneously constructs Muslims (Mughals) and Christians (English) as "foreigners" and enemies (because "they" ruled "us"); in part b) he conflates the modern nation state and its institutions (like the military) with older systems of administration and social organization (kings and kingdoms, caste-based division of labour and resources); and

¹⁰³ The *Bhagvad Geeta* is an important scriptural text for Hindus.

in part c) building on the previous two points he seeks to (mis)represent simultaneously, the caste system, its history and the foreignness of all non-Hindu religions.

The lesson text briefly extols the town's religious-spiritual significance, the rule of queen Ahilya Bai Holkar, and her social work as well as some of the archaeological evidence found in the town. It does not talk about caste except that from her marital name the queen's caste (warrior) can be inferred. In keeping with 'the Hindutva view of history' (ibid: 101) the lesson text also 'treats mythological religious figures like actual historical figures' (ibid: 103). For example, the mythological character of Parashuram is presented in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish him from the historical character, Ahilya Bai. Pramod Bhargav used the religious significance of the lesson to, once again, present his views of caste and bring in the theme of Hindu nationalism. While students, given their own experiences detailed in previous chapters, are hardly going to buy upper caste teachers' explanations or worldviews without question, textbooks certainly are not even trying to help students systematise their experiences and views on social phenomena and principles of organisation such as caste.

These excerpts not only capture the distorted view of caste that the teacher presented to students but also some of his right-wing tendencies. Many features of a right-wing view of history interrogated by Visweswaran et al. (2009) appear above – eliding realities of caste based oppression and violence, arguing that Hindu reformers, like Swami Vivekananda, reformed this system, presenting a distorted view of history and constructing Muslims and Christians as "foreigners". Ironically, the set of verses presented in the lesson, *Bhakti ke pad* ('Poems of devotion'), belonged to what's identified as *Bhakti* poetry in India and, *inter alia*, entailed challenges to the oppressive caste system in dominant Hinduism (ibid). Indeed, the lesson included verses by a lower caste poet, Sant Ravidas (or Raidas) and a woman poet, Meera Bai, from a royal Rajput (upper caste) family. However, since the lesson text did not identify these poets as such (except that Meera is clearly a woman's name) or offer any commentary on the context or significance of this class of poetry Pramod Bhargav was free to mediate students' encounter with poetry originally written to articulate resistance, in a way that he saw fit. This refusal to name and

engage caste allows upper caste teachers to present a distorted view of caste-based social gradations and (thus) legitimate their own position in the caste hierarchy.

7.1.4 Official knowledge and the everyday

Young (1971) argues that school knowledge is usually not only abstract and individuating, but also far removed from learners' experiences. This distance from everyday life has been a defining characteristic of most Indian textbooks (Kumar 2009, Gol 1993). For example, most strikingly, there were no characteristics of people/events/places that could specifically identify this millennium in any story in either textbook (Advani 1996, Scrase 1993 also found this). This had the effect of objectifying students as the 'other' of the voice in the text. How fundamental this contemptuous exclusion of the everyday – particularly, the everyday life of IWC students – is to formal education and success in it, became glaringly obvious during a *Bal Sabha* (Children's Meet), a rare extra-curricular event at the school. As part of the *Sabha*, an extempore competition was also organised and Anita (OBC) found herself speaking on the topic, 'the cow'. Following is an excerpt from fieldnotes taken during the event:

Cow – is our mother, we should respect it, we should never show disrespect toward the cow... / Other topics were – 'Great men', 'Hockey', 'Diwali', 'Water', 'Trees'. / Children [were] not speaking [based on their own] experience.... (30/10/2014)

Anita offered variations of the theme mentioned above in her 'speech' and sat down. Interestingly, Anita is one of two sisters in the classroom whose mother's family had traditionally been engaged in the caste-based occupation of making and selling sweets (Ahir community). Even in Indore, Anita's family actually owned cows; the girls adored these creatures besides being responsible for their care. However, having learnt from eight years of schooling that they were safer reciting ideas and facts from textbooks than articulating their own, Anita had become a smart enough (governmental) 'subject' to put her experience aside and repeat lines from a ten-line "essay" in her Sanskrit textbook. Further, the cow being identified as the "mother" of Hindus in the locally ubiquitous and strident Hindutva discourse was also reflected in Anita's emphasis on the animal's religious-cultural status rather than anything

about its role in the economy, specific trades or even her own emotional attachment to her cows.

The identity of the “good” schoolgirl was what Anita had sought to appropriate. This appropriation could be seen not only in her effort to draw upon textbook content, but also in that to present – both the text and herself – correctly. She had the right body language: hands folded behind her, standing erect and facing the students in front of her; forming the kind of neutral sounding objective, simple, grammatically correct, unemotional and stilted sentences that are encouraged within formal education (through textbook content and teacher talk). Yet, when I had first visited the girls’ home they had coaxed me into letting them have my camera and their livestock – cows, roosters, hens – were the first subjects of their photo shoot. None of this vibrant, warm, emotionally rich and rewarding experience, or the knowledge of cows gained from that experience, was articulated in her speech.



Figure 7.1 Anita outside her house with one of their cows.



Figure 7.2 Ranoo (right) and Pinky posing with the same cow. The three girls are sisters; Ranoo is also in Class VIII while Pinky is in Class VII in the same school..

7.2 Curricular form and ‘logics of control’¹⁰⁴

In the previous section I showed that textbooks misrepresented or invisibilised certain social groups. In this section I retain this focus on language textbooks as education policies have increasingly been formulated with the aim of monitoring learning outcomes in Mathematics and languages. But now I turn to the *form* of curriculum and show that it is as problematic as the content in that it denies students attending state government-run schools opportunities to develop ‘higher order and critical skills’ (Apple 2014); thus, and that curricular form and content operate in tandem in this classroom to objectify the IWC learner. My analysis of ‘curricular form’ (Apple 2013: 92) helps unpack the specific constraints and limits imposed on the process of teaching-learning through the *form* of curriculum. That is, the way the

¹⁰⁴ Apple 2013.

material is packaged and organised, including, the nature of practice exercises after each lesson and assessment¹⁰⁵.

Neoliberal reforms in Indian education have systematically attempted to further control and specify what happens in the classroom and ‘micromanage’ teachers’ work (Sarangapani 2010). As I show, such reforms have led to new instructions for teachers, learning goals and teaching and assessment practices; and most importantly, to the lowering of curricular standards. I use Apple’s conceptual framework to show 1) contradictions in the instructions and expectations coded in curricular form and 2) how standards are sought to be further lowered (though in uneven and inconsistent ways) through recent changes in education policy and practice in the state. Drawing upon Sarangapani (2010) I argue that curricular form reflects and furthers the project of diluting curricula as a result of the discourse of “quality” in “third world” countries like India. Diluting curricular content has implications for the skills and abilities students are required to develop. An interrogation of textbook exercises, test questions and government orders shows that the official focus is on ensuring the achievement of a minimal set of skills and ‘competencies’ rather than the ability to think critically and analytically on the part of IWC students.

7.2.1 Textbook exercises and a denial of higher order and critical skills

Firstly, as I showed in the previous section, lesson content in the prescribed textbooks for Class VIII is a set of basic facts and students are only required to reproduce these facts when called upon to do so in tests or during classroom teaching. In this section I offer examples of exercises given in the textbook to show that together the two severely limit what is required to be done in the classroom.

¹⁰⁵ Teachers such as M L Vishwakarma, and often Pramod Bhargav, do not even teach what little there is in the textbook. A teachers’ subject knowledge also mediates what she teaches and how; for example Jyoti Gupta is not a competent user of English herself so a textbook that offered more freedom to teachers and learner may not accomplish much in her classroom.

Neither content nor practice exercises offer any stimulation for discussion, reflection or creative thinking and writing and reduce classroom teaching and learning to the dull routine of reproduction of 'right' answers. Such texts and pedagogic practices have also historically achieved both 'deskilling' of teachers as well as individualisation of teachers' and pupils' work (Apple 2013). This is particularly contentious and merits research attention in the overall neoliberal context characterised by an official 'distrust' of teachers, the 'de-institutionalisation' of state government-run schools and the perception that this public-funded system of education is 'collapsing' (Sarangapani 2010).

Both Hindi and English textbooks for Class VIII contained three different types of questions: questions that test students' comprehension of lesson content, questions that test their understanding of grammar and lastly, questions that encourage relatively greater opportunity for students to do independent work and/or require experiences and knowledge that go beyond lesson content. English textbook also contained exercises that were expected to familiarise students with new words. For example,

From English textbook, Lesson 10, Balloon Man (p. 81):

Listen and Repeat:

days	bunch	green	high
stays	lunch	teen	sigh
rays	munch	between	tie

Pick out the rhyming words from the poem for the following words:

folds ____, funny ____, dining ____, mug ____, failing ____

Comprehension questions¹⁰⁶ (called *bodh-prashn* in Hindi):

Who always comes on market days?

What does he hold?

¹⁰⁶ Examples of similar questions from the Hindi textbook can be found in the next section on assessment.

What are the colours of the balloons which shine far away? (English textbook, p. 81)

These questions appeared on the monthly and final examinations as they are; that is, without reference to lessons thus requiring students to memorise not only answers but also the association between various lessons and questions. Then there were questions that tested students' knowledge of grammar. In English textbooks, these were grouped under the 'Let's Learn'¹⁰⁷:

A) Read the following sentences and learn the use of "and", "but" and "or". These words are used to join or link, words or clauses. (There were several pairs.) Example:

i. You must take care. You will fall sick.

* You must take care, or you will fall sick.

B) Now rewrite these sentences using "and", "but" and "or" as linkers. (There were several pairs) Example:

i. Give me a pen. Give me a pencil. (English textbook, p. 60-61)

Section A has some words and section B lists their antonyms in the wrong order. Write them in the correct order (it was a sort of 'match the column' exercise).

Section A	Section B
Meaningless	darkness
Favour	meaningful
Compulsory	beginning
End	harm
Light	optional (English textbook, p. 98)

The third type of questions were called 'Skill development' (*Yogyta Vistar*) in Hindi; in English, the questions are categorised variously under the headings, 'Let's Talk', 'Let's Read', Let's Write, 'Let's Do It'. This type also had its share of questions requiring collection and/or presentation of information but demanded information that would not be available in the absence of private resources like books and

¹⁰⁷ Grammar was the only area where the difficulty level of questions differs between the two languages, Hindi language grammar being of a higher difficulty level than English. In the Hindi textbook these questions were called 'Language study' (*Bhasha adhyayan*).

newspapers at home and/or shared resources, like school libraries. However, this category also included more interesting questions which offered some scope for students to think creatively and speak in a more informal context about everyday experiences. For example:

Sometimes efforts to obtain something for “free” bring problems in their wake. Narrate such stories to the class. (Hindi textbook, p. 36)

What kind of music do you like? Describe it in your own words and narrate in the classroom. (Hindi textbook, p. 19)

An example from the English textbook (which also had a large number of unseen passages of poetry and prose in the ‘Let’s Read’ sections):

Write a dialogue between the earth and the moon with the help of the clues given below:

1) Charming personality, 2) the earth is unhappy because of the population problem. 3) Pollution. 4) Earth: _____ Moon: _____ (English textbook, p. 72)

Such exercises in the English textbook invariably offered several pointers and guidelines not trusting teachers and pupils to work these out individually and/or collectively. The third set of questions was not taken up in either Hindi or English language classroom, nor were students encouraged to try and tackle these questions amongst themselves. Yet, these were the only questions that could have generated discussions among students and encouraged them to reflect and analyse ideas and bring their lived realities into the classroom. It was the first set of questions that received the maximum attention from teachers and along with the second kind, appeared consistently on monthly tests. The second set of questions were taken up systematically by Jyoti Gupta in the classroom, but less regularly by Pramod Bhargav. Neither teacher had knowledge of grammar; they also made mistakes frequently during their classroom teaching; but, at least, Jyoti Gupta tried to ensure that she dictated the correct answers. I suggest that Jyoti Gupta either copied answers from a guide, or wrote these down with someone else’s help because one, according to the students, the use of guides was not unusual in the school and two, she always had a set of notes with her when writing answers on the blackboard for students to copy. For both, the first and second kind of questions Pramod Bhargav encouraged students to rely on ‘guides’ as mentioned earlier and even distributed ‘Guides’ among students, whereas Jyoti Gupta tried to ensure that students copied answers

from the blackboard and memorised the these. Thus, memorisation and reproduction remained the focus rather than the development of analytical and other higher order skills among the IWC students in this classroom.

7.2.2 Timetables, control and minimalist conceptions of learning

There were two important aspects of curricular form that could be observed in the classroom: one, tabulated instructions printed at the beginning of language textbooks regarding the skills and competencies sought to be transmitted through each lesson and the time frame for completing lessons and conducting monthly tests and two, instructions from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra on revision between the months of November 2014 and March 2015. In the English language textbooks the table listed only aspects of language education whereas in the Hindi language textbook the focus included values to be imparted through each lesson as well; for example, appreciation of nature, nationalism and patriotism, honesty or service¹⁰⁸ (Froerer 2007, Kumar 2005, Visweswaran et al. 2009). Thus, in this instance, form and content explicitly combined to objectify both teachers and students by seeking to control their work.

Apple's theorisation of curricular form and its implications for classroom processes (Apple 2013) also offers a framework for interrogating the 'logic of control' (ibid: 96) that shapes teachers' and pupils' work through an analysis of 'simple', 'technical' and 'bureaucratic' controls (ibid: 95). In state government-run schools, it is bureaucrats rather than teachers who control curricular decision-making (Gol 1993) and thus the textbook itself has become a form of bureaucratic control in the Indian context (Kumar 1989). At the same time, both the textbook and the timetables developed by the Rajya Shiksha Kendra also acted as technical controls; because both contained instructions on the use of teaching time and the 'time-bound' completion of tasks, thus seeking to control teachers' – and by implication, pupils' – work. Apart from philosophical and ideological issues the timetables also raised practical concerns.

¹⁰⁸ Each lesson in the Hindi textbook also began with a box containing bullet points on what ought to be taught/learnt in that lesson – grammar and values.

The expectation that teachers and students will complete a certain portion of the syllabus every month irrespective of the number of school days, various disruptions (like elections and severe weather) or the difficulty levels of concepts in a lesson forced even teachers like Usha Pandey to focus on *completion* rather than *comprehension* on students' part. For example, October 2014 saw four festivals: Diwali, Dussehra, Eid and Muharram – all bank holidays in the state of Madhya Pradesh – leaving about two weeks' worth of school days.

Moreover, the Rajya Shiksha Kendra sent detailed instructions for revision in Mathematics, Hindi and English which is significant in view of the global focus on languages and Mathematics in the discourse of high-stakes standardised testing, as pointed out by Soudien et al. (2012). The problems of a textbook-centric curriculum and pedagogy aside, there is a significant difference in the curricular standards represented by the textbook and those coded in official orders for 'revision' and assessment systems. Following are two examples of instructions received by the school in the academic year 2014-15¹⁰⁹: One set of instructions listed what had to be done weekly between the months of November 2014 and March 2015. While it specified content for each week it *did not list goals class wise*. Instead, grades were grouped together thus: Classes I and II, Classes III-V and Classes VI-VIII. Given that the textbooks prescribed for each Class were different and were explicitly intended to teach concepts in each subject in a graded manner this was a baffling order. For a student cohort that has been learning English from Class I onward it was also surprising that the RSK limited its expectations from these Class VIII students to practicing the following very specific, discreet and basic "skills":

- a. First four lines of the poem – The Star (from Class VI).
- b. Practice answering the following questions:
 - i. What is your name?
 - ii. What is your father's name?
 - iii. What is your mother's name?

¹⁰⁹ Getting dates for each order was difficult at times as the Head Master had to print documents from the state website and what I had access to, were printouts filed together, sometimes, without a date on the page. I took pictures of the orders and used these for my analysis.

iv. How old are you?

At times, the order contained instructions for teachers to revise the previous week's activities (*'punaravritti'*). Teachers were expected to organise *Bal Sabhas* every week and 'encourage' students. Ultimately, none of this or regular teaching was possible from December onwards as detailed in chapter five. However, such instructions clearly convey the idea that for middle school students in this category of schools only these minimum 'basic competencies' were expected to be learnt. Such a focus makes a mockery of the syllabus in the textbook and allows less interested and committed teachers like Pramod Bhargav and M L Vishwakarma to ignore students' actual learning needs, interests, or, indeed, their "learning levels".

In addition to the teachers, various other bureaucrats and stakeholders were expected to visit the school and evaluate these efforts at revision; this can be seen in the space allotted in the document reproduced below for entering the number of '*'s given to the school by various officials based on their evaluation. These documents provided, detailed instructions regarding the process and criteria of evaluation. Though as far as could be ascertained during fieldwork, nothing was being done as a result of such evaluation of students and schools, in view of international trends in measuring quality, learning outcomes and ranking schools as a step toward financial decision-making (Soudien et al. 2012, Sarangapani 2010) it would be unwise to ignore such instructions. On the following page is an example of the instructions sent from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra to the teachers at this school:

Table 7.2 Instructions regarding teaching from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra.

	<p>Ensuring teaching-learning in time bound manner</p> <p>Nov 2014 to Mar 2015</p> <p>For class I – VIII</p> <p>In order to develop basic competencies in Mathematics, Hindi, English</p> <p>(Every day from 11:00 to 11: 30)</p>
Efforts to develop ‘basic competencies’ (<i>mool dakshtayen</i>)	<p>General instructions-</p> <p>Teach every day from 11:00 till 11:30 (<i>sic</i>)</p> <p>Efforts to bring children up to their Class level in competencies related to that Class level and content prescribed in work plan</p>
	For evaluation stars have to be awarded as per the following
By teacher teaching the subject	* can be given when prescribed basic content has been covered (<i>nirdharit mool vishayvastu</i>)
By Public Instructor (<i>Jan shikshak</i>)	* can be given when prescribed basic content has been covered
By BRC ¹¹⁰ (Block resource Coordinator)	* can be given when prescribed basic content has been covered
By DIET (District Institute of Education and Training)	* can be given when prescribed basic content has been covered
Maximum total ‘stars’	***** (when all prescribed content completed)

¹¹⁰ In the original this was misprinted as BAC.

For Mathematics too, instructions from the RSK were limited to a focus on the four basic operations – addition, subtraction, multiplication and division – on up to six-digit numbers.

Table 7.3 Instructions regarding revision from the Rajya Shiksha Kendra.

Revision	
Classes I and II	Counting
Class 2 to 8	<p>12 to 16 Jan 15 Tables (ask randomly)</p> <p><i>On 17 Jan 15 – celebrate Math week in Bal Sabha and children’s evaluation and encouraging them.....</i></p>
Class 2 to 8	<p>19 to 23 Jan 15 – on Addition</p> <p>(keeping in mind usually committed mistakes)</p> <p><i>On 24 Jan 15 – celebrate Math week in Bal Sabha and children’s evaluation and encouraging them.....</i></p>
Class 2 to 8	<p>27 to 30 Jan 15 – on Multiplication</p> <p>(keeping in mind usually committed mistakes)</p> <p><i>On 31 Jan 15 – celebrate Math week in Bal Sabha and children’s evaluation and encouraging them.....</i></p>
Class 2 to 8	<p>02 to 06 Feb 15 – on Division</p> <p>(keeping in mind usually committed mistakes)</p> <p><i>On 7 Feb 15 – celebrate Math week in Bal Sabha and children’s evaluation and encouraging them.....</i></p>
Class 2 to 8	<p>09 to 13 Feb 15 – on Division</p> <p>(keeping in mind usually committed mistakes)</p> <p><i>On 14 Feb 15 – celebrate Math week in Bal Sabha and children’s evaluation and encouraging them.....</i></p>

The Class VIII Mathematics syllabus actually included topics like: cubes and cube roots; profit, loss and interest; linear equations in one variable; division of polynomials, parallel lines; special quadrilaterals; surface area and volume. So it was extremely problematic that students were being expected to only know basic skills like multiplication and division. Thus, it would seem that the minimum was being brought down to the lowest level and the focus was on ascertaining that this minimum is learned. While learning goals are being lowered citing the imperative of reducing pressure on students, these lowered standards are often only applicable to students in state government-run schools¹¹¹. Standards are not being lowered universally across categories of schools; thus when it comes to higher education and jobs, these IWC students in this category of schools will be at a substantial disadvantage compared to middle and upper-class students. Apart from these detailed instructions to teachers and newly emerging forms of evaluation and ranking no efforts are being made to ensure learning.

7.3 Assessment

7.3.1 Policy context

In chapter five I discussed the kind of pedagogy adopted in the classroom and in the previous sections of this chapter, the salient features of curricular content and form. I have also unravelled the implications of both pedagogy and curriculum for the (re)production of inequality in and through education. In this section I show that assessment policy and practices only compounded the discriminatory effects of curricular and pedagogic factors in the classroom. Assessment is vital to any analysis of classroom processes and texts because clearing examinations is the most important, if not the sole aim of classroom teaching and learning in Indian schools. Kumar (2004) notes that historically ‘the main concern of both the teacher and

¹¹¹ As opposed to Central Schools or private schools. There is also urgent need for more comparative work and research with other categories of government and private schools but as Manjrekar (2013) notes, access to the latter is often difficult to obtain, if not impossible.

student was to prevent failure at the examination'; this approach has influenced pedagogy and strengthened '[t]he examination-textbook linkage' and 'defeated all attempts to reform the curriculum and methods of teaching.' (ibid)

In the neoliberal era of standardised testing and educational minimalism, especially in the public sector, assessment practices and policies bear greater scrutiny than ever, as this category of schools caters almost exclusively to the poor in contemporary India. In this section I discuss two aspects of assessment policy and practice in the school: one is the zero-detention policy (alongside the CCE) and two, the *Pratibha Parv*, a state-wide, standardised multiple-choice test implemented in Madhya Pradesh since 2011 (GoI 2015), which substantially impacted regular teaching by encouraging 'teaching to the test' (Menken 2006). It is important to note that I was not given access to student records so it was not possible to analyse students' scores. Moreover, a qualitative understanding of how various students performed on tests was, perhaps, more useful in this case. There are two reasons for making this argument: firstly, there was a no-detention policy in place and no student was allowed to 'fail' in any subject and secondly, since failing students was not an option, teachers did not try to prevent cheating on tests. Indeed, as Usha Pandey remarked to me once, it was better to let them cheat and write something in their tests-notebooks than to have to award them passing grades despite wrong answers or blank pages. This combination of circumstances led to a setting where students peeked freely into notebooks and textbooks during tests, asked friends for "help" and even the 'star' pupils occasionally "verified" answers with their friends. Thus, what helped in understanding student performance on tests was actually what teachers and students said in the classroom and in conversations with me. My focus in this chapter is not students' performance on tests; rather, it is on the intellectually and scholastically limiting nature of textbook exercises and assessment practices. The following discussion of tests allows me to argue that even the students who performed well on tests (Nilofar (OBC), Smita (Gen), Prachi (Gen), Bushra (OBC), Dilip (SC), etc.) were not being equipped in the classroom with the higher order skills that would be needed for successfully completing high school (Classed IX, X) and higher secondary (Classed XI, XII) or accessing higher education.

There were three kinds of tests that were conducted in an academic year: monthly tests (from June till February, maximum marks – 10 out of which 1 mark was for the oral examination and 9 for the written test), the *Pratibha Parv* (a kind of half-yearly examination as explained in chapter 5) as well as a year ending examination. All three kinds of examinations entail a focus on ‘scholastic’ as well as ‘co-scholastic’ components. However, as we have seen in chapter two there were no slots, or resources for, non-academic activities; and cultural and sports-related events were only infrequently organised. As I understood in my conversations with teachers co-scholastic and extra-curricular components of evaluation were mainly a means to ensure that all students ‘passed’ every year. Students’ scores on these components contributed to their final grade in every academic year in Middle School (Class VI-VIII).

The Right to Education Act 2009 (RTE) mandated the system of ‘Continuous and comprehensive evaluation’ (henceforth, CCE; GoI 2009, Nawani 2010) replacing the older system of three-monthly, half-yearly and annual examinations. Unfortunately, in Madhya Pradesh the idea of CCE took the form of monthly tests. While the idea of implementing a CCE system is not new, it was intended not only to ensure ‘all round development of the child’s personalit[y]’ but also to encourage schools to evolve their own and ‘multiple techniques of evaluation’ (NCERT 2005: 25). That is, teachers were to ‘own’ the ‘schemes’ they developed for such evaluation at the level of the school (ibid: 21). However, ‘even though CCE is proposed as a panacea for all examination-related ills, there is no clear explication of its meaning the way it is to unfurl in an actual classroom setting.’ (Nawani 2010: 34). The Model Rules notified by the MP state government also do not specify any details, but since 2010 the CCE and no-detention policy have been implemented at MP schools and incorporated students’ evaluation on co-scholastic measures.

7.3.1.1 No-detention policy

From the Right to Education Act 2009:

16. Prohibition of holding back and expulsion: No child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education.

From the RTE model rules for the state of Madhya Pradesh:

The school shall ensure:

- (i) No child admitted shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education in a school^[1]

The Head Master, Manish Tiwari, and other teachers, regularly made remarks like (field notes):

‘[Children] roam around like lions because [they know] they cannot fail...’
(*sher ban ke ghum rahen hain’ kyunki fail to ho hi nahi sakte*) (11/03/2015)

On the ground, the ‘no detention’ policy actually translated into some very unfortunate practices besides failing to create any gains in learning on students’ part as no other aspect of classroom life – class size, teacher availability or education, available facilities and infrastructure, curriculum or pedagogic practices – have changed (at least, not on the ground). It has made both teachers and students¹¹² take the tests more lightly than they might otherwise. Teachers’ constant lamenting of the fact of this policy certainly suggests that they believed that the possibility of failing would make students pay more attention. While I am critical of what the no-detention policy has done to pedagogic and assessment practices I am not decrying the idea of removing the brutal fear and pressure of examinations in India, which, among other things, have led to increasing reports of student suicide. My intention is only to point to what happens when only one aspect of education is “reformed” without corresponding effort to reform others. What I observed saw in the classroom was the combined effect of the zero-detention policy and the system of monthly assessment (CCE).

7.3.2 Assessment practices in the classroom

Following are my field notes during monthly tests in October 2014:

Short answer: 1) What was Amrita Devi’s slogan? 2) List any two advantages of *Shavasana* (a Yoga position).

Long answer: 1) Write a short essay on forestation. Or, [Describe] what were the main literary creations of the Gupta period?

¹¹² Though, of course, not all teachers and students.

(Hindi test, 13/10/2014)

There were 'fill in the blanks' and multiple-choice questions as well. Even for long answer questions students were dependent on textbooks. Oral tests became an even bigger farce in the hands of the less committed and knowledgeable teachers while the more committed ones like Jyoti Gupta or Usha Pandey tended to take care of oral evaluation as part of regular teaching and revision in the classroom. Here are some field notes from Pramod Bhargav's class during the oral test. I have included a number of notes in order to convey the general attitude towards tests and the contradictory and confusing messages it sends students with respect to the 'right etiquette' for test preparation and test-taking:

Bhargav sir asked me to sit next to him while he conducted the oral test. He said to the kids that he'd already asked these questions in monthly tests. Manish Tiwari, who was in the classroom, said 'see, children, even this facility is there...' (27/11/2014)

Manish Tiwari had again commented on the zero-failure policy today: 'if you have to take tests, and you cannot take students off the roll, or fail them then why would they come and/or study?' (27/11/2014)

Partly because of teachers, partly because of the state, pedagogic process has become such that students have no other incentive (than the fear of test) to learn: even if this learning is very limited. (27/11/2014)

Pramod Bhargav had a list of five questions he asked during the oral exam. All children were asked the same things in different order. How was this even reflecting anybody's knowledge of language? At the very least, he could have asked different questions from the lessons even if these were only factual. (28/11/2014)

Bhargav sir put dots against each name [during oral test] instead of final grades or marks. They have to somehow give each kid enough marks so they will pass. Hence all the other components in addition to exams. (11/12/2014)

Interestingly, despite his bluster and temper, I realised that most students were comfortable enough with Pramod Bhargav to choose how they answered: someone whispered answers in his ear out of shyness, someone spoke at a low volume or answered slowly.¹¹³ In the case of M L Vishwakarma things were worse because he did not repeat questions and students did not find him approachable:

¹¹³ On days when Pramod Bhargav was being pleasant to the students – and sometimes even when he was not – many students talked back to him, made jokes

During oral test in Social Science conducted by M L Vishwakarma: [usual threatening] tone, handwriting difficult to read. [...] Since it was an *oral* exam at the very least he could have read out the questions. (11/12/2014)

During Social Science monthly test in February 2015 I noted the following practices:

Test is about to begin – of which 4 questions M L Vishwakarma had given them yesterday. Some kids didn't have their test notebooks. M L Vishwakarma's screaming doesn't make much difference usually [...] Kids are often not told the test dates and syllabus well in advance. (05/02/2015)

M L Vishwakarma dictated answers to the first two questions. Terrible. 'Arey! Are you all animals?' He boomed. / Prachi was helping several kids. (05/02/2015)

Bhargav sir came into generally "discipline" the kids. [...] All these were worthless exercises as MLV is dictating answers anyway. And if teachers don't teach what does it matter whether children sit in two's or three's (on a bench); whether they talk or keep quiet? (05/02/2015)

Thus, while teachers 'leaked' papers and made oral and monthly tests "easy", or gave very short notice for tests (which did not allow students enough time to prepare), they also lectured students against cheating and mocked or humiliated those students who could not do well on tests, forgot examinations, notebooks or pens, or arrived late on test mornings. Such practices added to the confusion around the importance of tests and students' efforts to prepare for these. The questions asked on tests were anyway from the exercises or sample tests in textbooks. That is, teachers did not seem to be making any effort to formulate their own questions. All these practices point to a very indifferent, inconsistent official attitude toward ensuring that IWC students learnt anything, let alone concepts and skills appropriate to their ages, or stage of education. Such an attitude also meant that most of these students were not likely to complete school education once more serious examinations became the defining reality of life after Middle School. Nor would they be equipped to tackle competitive examinations that provided entry into higher education, particularly, to the more lucrative degree programmes. Thus, alongside

and generally seemed comfortable around him. It may have been because of his constant references to the everyday and his ready humour on his 'good days'. Though rare, I also found him displaying a sense of fun and appreciating students' abilities in non-academic areas. For example, one afternoon he came to get me so I could watch a lovely display of Michael Jackson's 'moonwalking' by Devraj and Namit in the school corridor.

curricular form, assessment policy and practice also tended to limit IWC students' learning experience affecting their ability to achieve upward mobility through success in school and higher education.

What the frustration of teachers like Manish Tiwari tells us is that they understood that students need to write exams after middle school and that the no-detention policy is not encouraging them to learn or, prepare in any other way for the future. The drop in Class IX pass percentage reported in the news confirms this belief. Finally, in August 2017 the central government declared that this policy will be scraped¹¹⁴ and teachers will be allowed to "fail" students in Class V and Class VIII. However, as educationist Anita Rampal has reportedly said,

"We know how our classrooms and teaching methods are. They are not at all motivating for the child. How can we even blame the child for our failures?" she asked. (*First Post*, 04 Aug 2017)

While this policy change might mean that students would know what is at stake right from the beginning of their school lives, it would still not help them learn better; indeed, as many experts and activists have argued, it simply allows the state to 'pas[s] the buck to the child.' (ibid) Thus an examination of teaching and learning processes and practices around monthly tests reveals that like the older system, it still 'fail[s] to test higher-order skills like reasoning and analysis,' besides refusing to 'make any allowance for different types of learners and learning environments.' (Nawani 2010: 34)

7.3.3 The neoliberal question of "quality"

Finally I turn to the *Pratibha Parv*. The test was first scheduled for Nov 15 for the 2014-15 session but had to be cancelled and was eventually rescheduled for 15 December, 2014. However, classroom processes began to reflect the significance of the test almost from the beginning of October as teachers, particularly the Head

¹¹⁴ However, the proposed amendment is yet to be tabled in the Parliament. Thus, whether this decision to scrap the no-detention policy will become reality or not is, as yet, unclear.

Master, began reminding students of the test almost every day, sometimes, several times a day, to prepare for it. The multiple-choice question paper also checked recall ability like the monthly tests; so it was unclear how the academic component of this test was supposed to promote learning that was qualitatively different from what monthly tests evaluated and promoted. Yet, significant time and effort was spent in preparing for the test. For example here are some notes on a practice session during Jyoti Gupta's class who had been using previous year's *Pratibha Parv* question papers to help children prepare.

Examples of questions being revised in class: 1) The opposite gender of tiger is _____. 2) Correct prefix of word 'obey' is: _____. (Choice given: dis, un, re, in) 3) Superlative degree of 'difficult' _____.

In the unsolved papers of previous year, so much is being repeated. Also questions are mostly from the textbook. / Time left till *Pratibha Parv* is to be spent revising and doing extra questions given at the back of the book, unsolved, etc. / There are 'Practice Test' papers in the textbook. More questions, less content [in the book]. (10/11/2014)

Jyoti Gupta had also expressed frustration with the amount of work the test entailed on the day¹¹⁵): that apart from marking the papers they had to prepare lists, turn scores into letter grades and submit all the mark lists to the external who was present during the test on the same day. Secondly, they had to organize a *Bal Sabha* because the *Pratibha Parv* was expected to be an all-round evaluation of schools:

'It also involves assessment of teaching arrangements and facilities in the schools, other school activities such the Mid-Day Meal scheme, as well as progress on the syllabus. Attendance of students is also assessed along with the maintenance of school records. Additionally, the general knowledge of students and their personal hygiene are also assessed, their homework is monitored, and identification of students suitable for different grade categories is undertaken.' (GoI 2015: 40)

Other teachers, including Usha Pandey, were doing similar things and about a month later this process was still underway as the *Pratibha Parv* had been postponed:

¹¹⁵ At the time it was being conducted in a day, but now it is spread over three days every year.

M L Vishwakarma practicing for the *Pratibha Parv*: one question was – ‘in which state is the Tarapur Nuclear facility located?’ But instead of asking multiple choice questions Social Science should be dealing with issues like local communities’ resistance to Nuclear power plants in the country. / Vishwakarma sir hit Pawan and twisted his ear hard when the kid responded to a question out of turn. / He instructed them to memorise [answers to] all the multiple-choice questions as well as the ‘fill in the blanks and ‘answer in one line’ [ones]: ‘cram it all up well, memorise...’. (09/12/2014)

He had been practicing from a ‘Guide’. Again, irrespective of policies and edicts the more confident and committed teachers with better subject knowledge tended to do things differently. However, the official insistence on ‘completed’ notebooks and project files could not be ignored:

Science class: Usha Pandey asked Chhaya to take her copy back as the picture of the animal cell is missing and the copy is not “complete”. Pity that all the *Pratibha Parv* will evaluate is the completeness of the copy and not whether the girl understood what an animal cell is and how it works.

However, she is concerned that the kids understand. She asked them what they got from [that day’s] class, didn’t get any response and told them to draw and label the diagram. Before that she had asked them how many could read, look at the picture and understand what was going on. [No response from students.] (25/11/2014)

Preparation of “project files” entailed copying diagrams or explanatory sections from textbook and decorating the front and back pages of the file. This was, again, a rather pointless exercise if students did not grasp the concepts represented by the diagrams and texts they were copying. A few days later, in a note that is very close to Apple’s analysis of the American system of high-stakes test and standardised material and their implications for teachers’ autonomy and relevance of curricular material and pedagogies (Apple 2013: 99) I wrote in my field notebook:

Daily admonitions and exhortation [to] be present on Dec 15 for *Pratibha Parv* ...especially children who absent themselves frequently. Solid ‘teaching to the test’ as well – again, information, memory and presentation. Prabha Shinde points out at times [to the students] that they don’t understand. But then since understanding is neither the focus, nor is it tested they can’t be faulted for ignoring that. Also other authority figures decide what’s important, how it will be taught and when and how it will be tested. So [teachers and students] only need to follow instructions. Prabha Shinde is very mad that the kids don’t understand anything even though she explains everything carefully. Surprisingly, many kids said that they

like Sanskrit and don't mind Prabha Shinde[’s rebukes] because she explains [the lesson] and doesn't hit them. (12/12/2014)

Two days before the test I had noted:

Everyone is busy with preparation for Dec 15. / Manish Tiwari had to go get the material required for Dec 15 (the day *Pratibha Parv* was scheduled to be held). (13/12/2014)

The glowing praise in the central government document (prepared by the NITI Aayog¹¹⁶) obscures all this every day friction, contestation, preparation, teaching-learning practices and the impact of all the frantic activity on actual learning and teacher-pupil relations in the classroom. In terms of actual pedagogic practice or in the nature or focus of tests *Pratibha Parv* was no different from monthly tests. Indeed, it was difficult to ascertain what it contributed to the classroom experience of teaching and learning except tremendous pressure on students and staff. Yet according to the NITI Aayog document the government wished to replicate the model. The document contained a section on 'Key Challenges' which gave short shrift to 'lack of resources' in schools, inadequate or absent staff and issues of physical access to schools but discussed 'challenges with respect to capacity related issues in adapting to the new practices' (GoI 2015: 43). Another concern taken more seriously in the document related to 'iron[ing] out disparities' between individual students, schools and districts, *without a single mention of the format of the test, its content or the skills and knowledges it tested.*

Yet, the six page document featuring two and a half pages of images and graphics spent a third of a page on discussing 'Replicability and Sustainability' issues, that is, technical issues like data updation, the 'web-based model' and financial issues like the lack of any need to invest new or greater 'financial' or 'human' resources in the system in order to conduct the test (ibid: 43). The policy approach and realities of practice only highlight with renewed urgency Sarangapani's discussion of the neoliberal discourse of "quality" which has dissociated 'inputs' from 'outputs' and

¹¹⁶ The NITI Aayog ('policy commission') was constituted in 2014 under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to replace the Planning Commission. The Planning commission had been created after India's independence to look after the Five Year Plans which were, in turn, conceived to plan India's social and economic development. Like the Commission was, the Aayog is also headed by the Prime Minister of India.

focuses on measuring achievement and teacher performance (Sarangapani 2010). She argues that the notion and meaning of “quality” flows from international ‘aid agencies which are now operating directly and indirectly at both the National and State level[s]’ (ibid: 42) and greatly influence ‘policy texts and provisions’ (ibid: 41) while peddling a ‘minimalist’ approach to education and narrowing down the meaning of the term to ‘measurable’ learning outcomes (ibid). In view of the issues discussed so far in this thesis it is worth quoting Sarangapani at length:

Quality i.e. children’s learning achievement has taken the centre stage of India’s large scale education reform; there are no longer references to improving or changing curricular content, pedagogic processes, poor quality of textbooks or teachers and their quality. Not only is this term now an essential dimension of the planning process, it is also frequently the only one used to refer to the substantive dimension of education. (ibid: 46)

Most significantly, Sarangapani points out that the contemporary discourse of quality in India specifically relates to ‘the government system of schooling’ (ibid:46) and ‘to the education of the poo[r]’. That is, the focus is on making poor children’s education ‘efficient’ and ‘cost-effective’. In the process, such ‘tests become *de facto* [education] policy in schools.’ (Menken 2006: 521) Teachers begin to focus on what will be asked on the test instead of spending time and effort on concepts and/or skills students need. So far, it is not clear what the purpose of such a state-wide standardised test is. Since it is very similar in nature to the pedagogy and evaluation models used in monthly tests it may be argued that the tests are not doing any greater harm than was already being done. However, the emphasis of the NITI Aayog document on ‘best practices’ and replicability of this mode of testing should give us pause, particularly in view of the fact that said document mentions the term ‘quality’ twelve times in six pages.

Instead, as I have noted earlier and Sarangapani also argues, a more locally relevant and meaningful notion of ‘quality’ can be found in the Yash Pal committee report (GoI 1993; Sarangapani was also member of the research team for this committee) which is in stark contrast to this globalisation of meanings and standards of learning and achievement represented in the neoliberal term “quality” (Soudien et al. 2012).

Otherwise as classroom observations show, the travesty of learning and social justice in/through education may continue unabated in countries like India.

7.4 Conclusion

'School texts are characterised by their 'untouchable' and apolitical nature. They are received as the truth of a 'de-classed' cultural heritage. Whether we are talking about science or social science or literature or music, the analyses show the uncritical orientation of texts towards both the selection of 'facts' and their presentation within an ideology which leaves unchallenged the status quo. Children, if working class, are faced with a presentation of the real world which does not correspond to their 'lived' experience or, alternatively, with a view of the world as far too stable to be amenable to active reform.' (Arnot 2002: 67)

In this chapter, I have shown that textbook representations do not do justice to the social groups that the majority of the children belong to. Specifically, women are underrepresented; only certain kind of femininity that fits into dominant patriarchal ideology is represented. Since people of non-Brahman castes are also underrepresented and the realities of caste difference and conflict elided when women are present in textbook narratives, upper caste teachers and the specific pedagogic principles in use end up turning the presence of upper class middle class women into an opportunity to further devalue and deny the narratives of the IWC and/or non-Brahman girls in the classroom.

Absence of narratives of injustice and struggles against it also create space and opportunity for teachers to draw upon their own socioeconomic and cultural locations rather than engage with students' realities and worldviews. This is particularly true in the case of non-Brahman and minority perspectives. These questions of representation of non-dominant narratives is as much a problem of curriculum as of pedagogy. Both need to be reformed in order to make a diverse range of realities part of classroom discourses. Drawing upon Young's sociology of knowledge I have also shown that the gritty, messy and/or emotional 'everyday' is

also, largely, missing from textbooks. All these aspects of curricular content may alienate students who are offered no opportunity in the classroom to draw upon their experiences and life worlds to make sense of this content, and/or build on their knowledges and understanding.

Apart from content, I have critically engaged with curricular form to show the role it plays in brokering educational disadvantage for a majority of students. I have shown that content and form combine to remove all scope for students to explore, assert and develop 'higher order and critical skills'. As a set of, often irrelevant, facts the content fails to offer a fertile ground for children to use creative thinking, analysis, reflection or imagination. Similarly the form of exercises and tests fail to stimulate such educational activity on the part of students. Even where textbook questions require students to turn to their own worlds for answers teachers' lack of interest (and, in some cases, preparation) results in these questions being ignored. I have shown that in large part, this can be traced to the nature and focus of assessment in the classroom. The different kinds of examinations children face throughout the year only look at their recall ability; since historically examinations have driven classroom teaching, such examinations do nothing to help IWC students develop the higher order skills that will be needed for higher education or jobs that could help them move out of their poverty.

Lastly, through an analysis of state-wide standardised tests I have underscored the urgency of capturing the shifts in educational discourse and practices, especially in the context of poor children's education in government schools in India. In addition to standardised testing, I have shown through an analysis of government orders received at the school that a 'minimalist notion of quality' is a reality that threatens to further dilute educational goals and practice on the ground. Thus, both curricular form and content tend to objectify students as these are used to 'discipline' students' abilities and efforts.

Together with the last two analysis chapters, this chapter gives us a more complete picture of the overall classroom experience of IWC students and how various aspects of this experience (seek to) reproduce contours of dis/privilege and discrimination

alongside moments and acts of dissensus, that is, challenge to the police logic of state-funded education in India.

Chapter 8

‘What if (in)equality?’¹¹⁷: engaging possibilities for change within complicated histories

I had begun fieldwork hoping to understand how historically specific power relations are (re)produced in and through education and I had come back without neat and tidy answers. In this chapter I discuss what answers I did find and why they do not always offer clear-cut solutions to the problem of inequality in and through education in India. At the same time, I also discuss the moments and scripts that offer hope despite historical injustices. Part of the reason behind the untidiness and incompleteness of answers is the tension between my conceptualisation of difference and equality – in terms of genderclaste relations – in this thesis; and I continue to grapple with that tension in this effort to ‘conclude’ the thesis.

8.1 Classroom experience and ‘reproduction’ of dominant genderclaste relations

While no thesis is expected to deliver solutions to historical problems, my findings have implications for sociological understandings of educational inequality as well as everyday challenges to it in the classroom. This understanding begins with an appreciation of the genderclasted “child” who is the subject of education policy and practice in India. I found that this child was far removed from the ‘ideal’ uppercaste male child whose world was represented in textbooks and assumptions about whose lifestyle guided teaching practice. However, this informal working class child from a non-dominant caste in the classroom was simultaneously an ‘object’ of educational policy and practice.

Most of the children whose lives I researched belonged to the informal working class and their parents had been (internal) migrants to Indore. As a result of the precarious nature of informal sector work these families faced severe resource constraints and

¹¹⁷ The title is a take on the question, ‘So what if equality?’, posed by Friedrich et al. (2010: 575) in their discussion of implications of a Rancièrian approach to education.

were socioeconomically vulnerable (Harriss 2013); for all except a handful of families this vulnerability was also part of their historical locations (OBCs, SCs) in the caste hierarchy.

This class-caste location tends to affect IWC students' classroom experience in specific ways: ranging from the humiliation entailed in obtaining and submitting required documents for proving their eligibility for welfare benefits disbursed through schools, to comments on their 'moral' character and intellectual ability and motivation. Caste and gender-based discrimination does not operate in a linear and fixed fashion either; I have shown that changes and *potential* for change despite one's caste location and gender (for example, the presence of Dalit girls in school, loosening of neighbourhood and community monitoring mechanisms with the move to a city) can also trigger greater surveillance and/or attempts to humiliate students at home and school.

Simultaneously, the caste distance of students from teachers and the male, Hindu, upper-caste, middleclass educational ideal lead to severe constraints being placed on pupils' efforts to engage with classroom teaching and school knowledge, as well as the very visibility of their efforts to teachers. Instead, the upper caste, middle class teachers tended to equate financial limitations with moral and intellectual incapacity (Morley 1997, Sriprakash 2012). Framed within feminist critiques of gendercaste relations and Foucauldian and Rancièrian perspectives on subjectification and stultification respectively, my analysis shows that teachers understand neither the material and symbolic content of impoverishment and historical disadvantage, nor its myriad and debilitating effects on students' and parents' ability to engage with the demands of administration, formal teaching or the cultural logics of caste institutionalised in/through the institution of school.

While I found that teachers varied significantly in their approach to students, their knowledge of their subjects and their efforts to teach, the views and practices of even the kindest and most committed teachers were embedded in caste relations in multiple ways. However, I suggest that with the more committed teachers who are willing to, at least, begin conversations about why children do not learn, or, how they may learn better, it may be possible to begin critiquing school infrastructure,

curriculum and pedagogy, rather than students and their families. It is also important to engage with teacher education and reimagine it in tandem with educational practice in order to help teachers develop critiques of their own social locations and educational and work experience. Yet, echoing anti-caste activist, thinker and social reformer, Jyotiba Phule's critique articulated more than 130 years ago in response to the colonial government's policy of employing upper caste teachers and inadequate expansion of education (Venkatesh 2008), I argue that there is also urgent need to bring in teachers from a range of sociocultural backgrounds so they can relate to the experiences and life-worlds of marginalised communities. It is equally important to ensure that these teachers are not merely appointed as Guest Teachers casually, but offered the security of regular, full-time jobs. While research on race and class in education shows that, for example, White teachers can work empathetically with Black children (Lipman 1998), it is important to have a substantial number teachers from non-dominant castes and (informal) working classes for institutional discourses of education to change.

Furthermore, I have shown that the effects of poverty and caste distance from teachers were also *gendered*, shaping girls' lives differently and often, in far more oppressive ways than it did boys'. This difference was reflected in some girls' dual burden of work, the stifling restrictions on movement and interaction as well as greater scrutiny in the classroom. I suggest that this combination of patriarchal logics at home and school may influence girls' participation in the classroom and the significance of school and education for them in contradictory ways. Though there are differences between girls (some find more freedom at school, others find homes more tolerant of their interest in fashionable clothing or their interaction with boys), I also suggest that overall, girls may have valued school more than boys and for a different set of reasons. As my findings in chapter five and six indicate, girls came to me for help with learning more than boys did. Secondly, the *distribution* of girls' and boys' quotes in the two chapters suggests that girls were less vocal and/or less critical of school infrastructure and pedagogic practices than boys.

Combining these findings with those discussed in chapter four I venture that one, for girls, patriarchy and moral policing were greater and more omnipresent problems compared to pedagogic concerns; secondly, school was valued far more by girls as it

is a rare social and public space to which they have relatively legitimate access outside of family functions, like weddings. It offers them the opportunity to form emotional bonds with other girls and they derive comfort from these friendships and by exchanging strategies of resistance. At the same time, girls being supported by families to complete education and/or find jobs, may see education as a potential, if somewhat limited, *escape* from patriarchal confinement to the home and hearth. What I find worth emphasising is that despite this emotional and practical investment in education and the potential of greater independence and upward mobility through education, girls were reluctant to approach teachers for help with studies or anything else. I suggest that this is, at least, partially, a result of the gendered moral curriculum of the school as well as being a function of teachers' caste-based views of students' abilities. In a brutally patriarchal society, such views may harm girls in incalculable ways.

8.2 Taking (cautious) comfort in pupil resistance and agency: politics and 'production' of power relations

In the previous section I talked about the ways in which historical inequalities are reproduced in education through marginalisation of students. In this section I take stock of the ways in which students resist this marginalisation through instances of governmental and political subjectivation. This artificial separation between processes of 'reproduction' and 'production' (Arnot 2002) is only in the interests of organisation of this chapter. In practice, as I showed in chapter five and six particularly, the *police* and *political* logics are far more enmeshed with each other¹¹⁸ (Rancière 2011).

In chapters four and five I have shown that students have abilities to learn and survive that are not valued at school. Whether it is Sunita's tackling of harassment

¹¹⁸ I am not equating 'productive power' with 'politics'. The distinction between the two is important to that between Foucauldian and Rancièrian conceptions of subjectivity. Discussed in chapter two.

or Prakash's learning various skills, students manifest a resourcefulness that is often rendered invisible in the classroom. As Manisha Mashaal's opening quote in chapter one recounts, the work of surviving is not seen as demanding intellectual ability. Yet, reading/producing these accounts of intellectual equality - manifested in learning new skills, and learning to survive in/beyond the classroom – allows this thesis to, at least, begin to disrupt existing policy and public discourses of intellectual difference and “weak” students, particularly with respect to the ‘deficit’ view of students from non-dominant caste and/or IWC background.

More importantly, the ethnographic accounts of students' views and ability to challenge police logics (chapter six) offered in this thesis reveal possibilities for solidarities across difference: whether it is in friendships across caste and religion, or in pupils' views of gender equality and unconventional gender images. Unfortunately, classroom discourses obstruct friendships across genders far more than friendships across caste or the “good” students/“bad” student divide. Otherwise, students like Rashmi (SC) and Dilip (SC) might forge a solidarity that could, at least, at a personal level, take on gender- and caste-based discrimination. The shift in roles that I discussed in chapter four, namely, boys taking on responsibilities of care at home, may also have implications for a change in domestic gender relations.

Instances of political and governmental subjectivation have consequence at both, the level of individuals and classrooms. For example, Chhaya (SC) experiments with, and models, resistance, but she is also invested in learning while seeking to subvert the social relations embedding her experience of formal education. The impact of efforts by students like Chhaya (SC), Dilip (SC), Prakash (OBC) and Taruna (OBC) to learn and challenge social and institutional categories may not be easily captured ethnographically, but it showcases the possibility of, at least, individual learning, survival, and perhaps, even success at school.

This hope comes with a cautionary note because of the structural issues discussed earlier in this chapter. While governmental and political agency, may, at times, entail changes to material conditions (through, say, educational success, learning non-school skills/knowledges) and may lead to solidarities and more collective resistance in or beyond the classroom, these will necessarily be tentative and micro narratives.

As such, they may not (always) be adequate for challenging historical social relations. Therefore, it is important to engage with both, policy changes and engaging with efforts on the ground. What Rancièrian understandings of politics tell us, is precisely that change cannot be conceptualised on the basis of a theory/practice divide where the work of thinking and doing is divided between a supposedly superior and inferior intelligence respectively.

8.3 What needs to change

Clearly, policy changes are sorely needed. But the space for discussing greater investment in education and an egalitarian education policy have shrunk substantially (Sarangapani 2010). However, like Sriprakash's (2012), my work also shows that without changes to infrastructure – class-size being central – addressing other aspects will be difficult to change. Currently, instead of there being more on offer for 'first generation learners' there is actually less (Ramachandran 2004).

When Sarangapani (2010) claims that input and output have been isolated and when I argue that connections between various aspects of classroom experience must be acknowledged, we are making a somewhat similar argument. In terms of curriculum and pedagogy, what can be ensured is space for accepting and encouraging students' skills and interests and resources to help develop these; however, the exact routes and results cannot be specified beyond a point. How students learn what they learn and at what pace they learn must remain flexible. Currently, students are not trusted to take an interest in learning, or, ask or pursue questions on their own, but my findings disprove these assumptions. This does not mean that there will be no plans or timeframes in the classroom at all, but that such planning has to be left to teachers and students to be determined in context specific ways far more than it is.

However, in view of my discussion in chapter seven, it is also important to remember not to let such approaches essentialise and reify community-knowledge linkages. In a country where livelihoods have been based on caste identities for centuries (Chakravarti 2006), it is important to ensure that education offers means to disrupt these linkages. I draw upon two blog pieces written from non-dominant feminist

perspectives to underscore some of the critical questions of social justice related to questions of knowledge and upward mobility. In a blog post entitled, 'The Brahmin Problem'¹¹⁹, Computational Biologist and Dalit feminist, Anu Ramdas¹²⁰, offers a brief and pithy commentary on the way mainstream definition, analysis and resolution of structural inequalities, largely, remain embedded in Brahmanical and elitist worldviews. In pointing to the irony of "the poor" (often, also Dalit) not having any role to play in official discourses around the definition and eradication of poverty¹²¹, Ramdas can also be read as pointing to the fact that the lived realities of marginalised communities never become the basis of "official knowledge".

That decision-making processes are dominated by upper caste groups and that the basis of decision-making are Brahmanical worldviews, are two sides of the same coin. This is why I read Ramdas's analysis as a commentary on the *character of education* in India. I suggest that the assumptions underpinning school curricula need to be challenged not (only) because these alienate marginalised students from school education, but also because this official knowledge is not restricted to schools but embedded across institutions. That is, changes to official knowledge must be seen in the larger context of worldviews and knowledges driving policy.

At the same time, as Razzack (1991) shows in the context of minority students, linking sociocultural identities with knowledges in classrooms can also lead to essentialism. Asha Singh argues in her blog post¹²² that girls from rural Ahir households (like herself) often wish to escape that occupation and lifestyle. The caste-based occupation entailed constraints and responsibilities that Asha Singh found undesirable and that was the impetus for her to succeed in education. In other words, reimagining school curricula also means that while non-dominant worldviews are represented and engaged with, other worldviews – and opportunities of upward

119 <https://castory.wordpress.com/>, March 4 2015.

120 <http://www.dalitweb.org/?p=874>.

121 Though the correct word, as Prof. Abdul Paliwala pointed out during the 'Beyond Development' (May 2016) conference at Warwick is impoverishment. People don't just happen to be poor; poverty of certain sections is brought about through certain processes and structures in a society; people are made poor – they are 'impoverished'.

122 <http://www.dalitweb.org/?p=3454>.

mobility associated with those – are also made available to children from these groups. They must not end up being *tied to* caste-based identities, knowledges, and thus, occupations. In other words, what is needed is to offer access to the ‘culture of power’ by helping students appropriate school knowledge and ways of being, while also equipping them to deconstruct the sociocultural hierarchies that underpin this culture of power (Delpit 1995). Such an approach can open up ways for students to succeed in both the short and the long term.

8.4 Contributions of this thesis

Firstly, in undertaking an intersectional analysis of lived realities of “childhood” on the basis of rich ethnographic insights into these realities, I have contributed to sociological understandings of “childhood” and the discussion of multiple childhoods in the “developing” world. Yet, by clearly tracing the socioeconomic and educational constraints placed on IWC children and families I help identify the areas where the state needs to do *more*, rather than slipping into a relativism that allows it to abdicate its responsibilities (Balagopalan 2002, Kumar 2010). As discussed in chapter two this is an important argument in view of neoliberal discourses around child labour, education and welfare. Moreover, as debates around childhood show, nuanced sociological understandings of childhood with reference to the wider social and economic context are vital to discussions of the “non-normative” child’s educational experience (Pappu and Vasanta 2010, Raman 2000, Vasanta 2004)

I have also simultaneously offered detailed analyses of this historically specific genderclasted child’s classroom experiences thereby addressing an important gap in the existing literature. The limited literature that exists on classroom processes in India, rarely makes systematic references to the larger logics of Brahmanical patriarchy (intersections of gender and caste); my analysis offers nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which genderclaste logics operate in the classroom. The operation of these logics is complex because the multiple axes of differentiation do not always work in tandem. Through selective appropriation of the ‘educational ideal’ some students manage to make school ‘work’ for them and

achieve social and educational success. Alongside instances of governmental subjectivation, there are also instances of political subjectivation wherein pupils explicitly challenge social and educational categories (“Dalit”, “girl”, “good” student) without endangering their opportunities to learn and survive in the classroom.

It is this production of power relations that potentially upsets the ‘game’ of genderclaste based oppression and marginalisation. While governmental subjectivity also allows us to appreciate students’ agency and active engagement in the exercise of power, political subjectivity offers a different reading of students’ agency – enabling the reading of ‘political’ agency that entails a challenge to the police logic of genderclaste relations by specifically challenging the organising categories underpinning social and classroom discourses. Thus, this Rancièrian appreciation of students’ assertions of equality is a particularly significant contribution of this thesis.

8.5 Limitations

However, since the focus of this thesis was not a textual analysis of policies, I limited my attention to policy to an analysis of the content of instructions for teachers and the intentions and provisions coded in one relevant policy document (chapter seven). This is a limitation of this thesis. A more thorough analysis of policy documents and their overall political and economic context will offer greater and more systematic insights. Secondly, a discussion with students of exact lesson content would have been more useful but as explained in chapter seven, students were wary of discussions of textbooks and by the time I had built relations of trust there were hardly any opportunities to pursue this idea; spaces to sit down and systematically engage with students (because of inconsistent attendance) became limited and I had to follow up already existing lines of inquiry.

* * *

Is it the job of education (alone) to achieve social justice or bear witness to assumptions and assertions of equality? No. But, perhaps, nor can this be achieved without transformation of the form, patterns of access to, and content of, education

in India. Education does not – indeed, it must not be made to – bear the entire burden of social change or social justice. However, without changes in and through education the scale and scope of any project of social justice may suffer. I use words like ‘may’ and ‘perhaps’ because events in the country everyday demonstrate that despite education people continue to engage in dissensus, to support movements aiming to fundamentally challenge development paradigms, caste-based hierarchies and patriarchies. Irrespective of their diverse experiences of education, individuals and communities challenge various police logics that they are enmeshed in. But, perhaps, with the reimagining of education this task shall become that much more bearable and possible.

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